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SOCIETY RACKET

**A CRITICAL SURVEY OF
MODERN SOCIAL LIFE**

**BY
PATRICK BALFOUR**

ILLUSTRATED



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TO C. E. K.

SINCE the principal sources for a study of contemporary social life must needs be the newspapers, I have to express gratitude notably to the *Daily Mail*, the *Weekly* (now *Sunday*) *Dispatch*, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Sketch* for numerous quotations from their pages ; also to *Harper's Bazaar*, from which the greater part of Chapter III is reprinted. Amongst other works I am indebted to Mrs. C. S. Peel's *A Hundred Wonderful Years*, and Mr. O. F. Christie's *The Transition from Aristocracy* for s'delights on the nineteenth century. For permission to reproduce photographs thanks are due to the following : The *Daily Sketch*, the *Daily Mail*, *Vogue*, the *Tatler*, and the *Architectural Review* ; Messrs. Bassano, Bertram Park, Yevonde, Paul Tanqueray, Peter North, Dorothy Wilding, E. O. Hoppé and Keystone ; to Messrs. Godfrey Giles for their modern Mayfair interior ; and to Mr. Tony Wysard and the proprietors of the *Tatler* for permission to reproduce his version of a cocktail party at my house.

P. B.

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SOCIETY RACKET

PROLOGUE

Snobbery our national foible—The Balfours of Pilrig—Lady Patricia's Pigtails—"Keeping up appearances"—A "Gentleman's Education"—Snobbery as a source of strength—Society is dead : Long live Society !

EVERY nation has its own pet form of self-indulgence. The Frenchman gets a secret thrill of satisfaction from hoarding his money. The German has a weakness for uniforms. In the East such idiosyncrasies take on a more extreme and pervasive form, as in the Indian's love of suffering and the Chinaman's preoccupation with death. In the West they become more physical. Bootleg liquor is the foible of the North-American ; the southern continent likes its women. By the same token does the Englishman indulge in snobbery. "It is impossible," wrote Thackeray, "for *any* Briton, perhaps, not to be a snob in some degree." And the words are true today.

Some years ago I was crossing the Channel from France. On the boat a stranger came up to me and said, "You're Lord Balfour's son, aren't you ?"

I blushed for Lord Balfour's venerable celibacy. "Certainly not," I said. "Lord Balfour is a man of irreproachable moral virtue."

"Sorry," he said. "They told me you were Lord Balfour's son. My name's Maurice."

He was Maurice Mouvet, the dancer, who used to partner Leonora Hughes.

"I know Lord Balfour well," he said.

"I have not that honour."

"Oh!" he said. Then: "Come and have a drink."

"Certainly."

He then explained to me that he was "in a fix." He was coming over to England for a week-end honeymoon. He had not been informed at his Paris hotel that, being an American, he would require a visa in order to land. Now the passport officer on board was threatening to send him and his bride back by the next boat from Dover. It was very awkward, as he was engaged to appear that night at a party in London. It was not as if he intended remaining in London. There was no question of his taking up work there; he had to be back in Paris next week. Would I come with him to the passport officer and explain?

"I don't quite know," I stammered, "what *I* can do."

"I thought that, being Lord Balfour's son——"

"I am *not* Lord Balfour's son."

"Have another drink."

I had another drink.

Then he said, "Come and meet my wife."

On deck I was presented to a resplendent blonde in orchids and a mink coat. "This, my dear," said Maurice to her, "is Lord Balfour's son."

My protest died on my lips as I saw on her face the dawn of that beaming, half-timid expression with

which one is accustomed to greet a celebrity. "Lord Balfour?" she said. "I'm honoured——"

But Maurice cut her short. "Look here, old man," he said to me, "just come along to the passport chap for a moment and say you know me."

Meekly I went. Maurice strode into the little office, and before I realized what was occurring I heard him say, "Allow me to introduce you to Lord Balfour. Lord Balfour knows me well and will vouch for me as a proper person to be admitted into England."

The passport officer rose. He straightened his tie. He bowed across the table at me. "I am much honoured," he said, "to make Lord Balfour's acquaintance."

What could I say or do? My pitch was qucered.

"Naturally," he went on, "if Lord Balfour says so, there will be no more difficulty." I nodded, smiling vacantly. Whereupon the passport officer took his pencil and scrawled across the passports of Maurice and his wife, "LORD BALFOUR'S RECOMMENDATION." With which he bowed again and shook me by the hand.

"Thanks, old man," said Maurice. "I will see you get a seat in the Pullman."

To this discreditable story I will add another, which conduces rather to my humiliation.

It was at some film party in Rosita Forbes's house. Rosita said to me, "You must come and meet your namesake."

"Which?" I asked.

"Betty," said Rosita.

She led me over to where a well-developed blonde sat with a female chaperon against the wall.

She was like the type of *débutante* of whom one says, "Oh, she'll fine down in a year or two." The chaperon was a grim lady in black who rose at my approach.

"Mrs. Balfour," said Rosita. "This is *Mr.* Balfour. *Mr.* Balfour, *Mrs.* Balfour, *Miss* Balfour."

I shook hands proudly with the famous star.

Instantly Mrs. Balfour rapped out with severity: "Which Balfour are you?"

Now this is the type of question which I never can answer. Which Balfour, after all, was I? I stammered out something about being a journalist, I believed my family came originally from Fife, I——

But Mrs. Balfour drew herself up with hauteur and looked me full in the eyes. "We," she said, "are the Balfours of Pilrig." And then she turned away, placing a protective arm about her niece, who smiled benignly.

I slunk off, with the true, hangdog slink of the interloper.

"We are the Balfours of Pilrig!"

What pride of race is in those six words. What links with the past! What noble literary associations!—for was not Robert Louis Stevenson himself a Balfour of Pilrig? Envidable Miss Betty! Why was I not born a Balfour of Pilrig?

On every side there is abundant evidence of this pet luxury of ours. In fact it might almost be argued that the Englishman's sex repressions are released in manifestations of snobbery. He gets a definite "kick" out of meeting—even mentioning—a lord. A lord, to him, is not as other men are. The idea of a

lord titillates him with a combination of awe and almost lascivious excitement. He gloats over a lord as if he were some prize nectarine which one does not quite dare to eat.

Hence a lord, in England, cannot be himself. He can never be treated quite as an ordinary person. His introduction to a group of people induces a momentary electrical tremor, and their subsequent attitude towards him is insulated accordingly.

A lord is "news"; and the more obscure he is, the better "news." He cannot disappear, for his disappearance becomes invested by the newspapers with a significance to which the movements of the ordinary individual never attain.

Take, for example, the case of Lord Perth.

Lord Perth came to my notice beneath the following newspaper heading :

WANDERING EARL
MYSTERY OF HIS MANY ABSENCES

Now I know nothing of Lord Perth ; but I would judge him, from what follows, to be a modest gentleman : the type of gentleman who prefers to lead his own humble life in his own humble way, unmolested by the glare of publicity and the curiosity of strangers. I imagine that Lord Perth likes to travel, to come and go as he pleases without anybody enquiring why or wherefore ; to live, in short, as many an individual lives who is not saddled with the accident of rank. He is, I am convinced, quite unmysterious.

But this is how Lord Perth's behaviour appears to the readers of Sunday newspapers :

" Friends of the Earl of Perth are once again speculating on his whereabouts. Every now and then he

disappears from sight in some foreign land, and these absences last for months on end.

"At the present moment he is away on one of these mysterious pilgrimages. His whereabouts is unknown to his most intimate associates. All they know is that he is alive and well. 'Where is the Earl today?' said a close relative to a ——— representative. 'That has become a familiar question in the family of recent years. To tell you the truth I don't know. He might be in the South Seas or on a trip to the North Pole—one of the few spots I believe he hasn't visited so far.'"

Here follows an account of Lord Perth's titles, birth, education, marriage and so forth. Then :

"When War broke out he was interned at Ruhleben. His fellow prisoners styled him the 'Pearl of Earth,' because although then in his 46th year he made the most gallant attempts to race against men half his age. He also gained the reputation of being the best chess player in the camp.

"The treatment he received during his internment decided him against Germany as a permanent place of residence, and on his release after the Armistice he returned to London. But it was not for long. Soon the old wanderlust claimed him, and within a very few months he was off again on his mysterious expeditions."

Further speculations on the mystery of Lord Perth are delayed until the following week, when the headlines inform us :

"MISSING " EARL FOUND

SIMPLE LIFE AT THE SEASIDE

"The wandering Earl of Perth who, as stated in last Sunday's———, so often puzzles his friends by disappearances to out-of-the-way places, has been located at Dawlish, the pretty little Devonshire seaside resort, where he is now living unostentatiously in

lodgings in a small apartment house. Though very few residents are aware of his identity he is a familiar figure in the town, where he is often to be met with, stalking along, cigarette in mouth and conspicuous by his tawny beard.

“He is the most retiring and modest of Earls, and only a few months ago might have been seen wielding a paint brush with much facility outside the window of his lodgings putting the finishing touches on some scroll work.

“The Earl is a member of the local Chess Club, which meets weekly in a room over a restaurant, and has the reputation of being a skilful player.” Etc.

Poor Lord Perth! Mr. John Betjeman should indite the ballad of “The Wandering Earl of Perth” in the style of Sir Walter Scott’s “Fair Maid.”

This is no isolated case. The newspapers are filled with other such tales. The public is thrilled to read that the Earl of Shannon can whistle a tune backwards, but the news that any mere commoner could achieve the feat would leave them unmoved.

When Sacheverell Sitwell was married the newspapers emphasized the fact that he was the grandson of an earl. They were right. Earl’s grandsons, in England, are held to be of more account than poets.

Maurice Baring was once described in a gossip paragraph as “the Hon. Maurice Baring, whose books are popular among officers of the Brigade of Guards;” a morsel of literary criticism only to be equalled by the American society women who give testimonials in the newspapers to a certain edition of novels.

The sporting world enjoys its lords equally: *vide*,

PEERS AT THE WICKET

“Cricket . . . at once became the topic of discussion when Lord Aberdare’s death was reported yesterday.

"His heir, the Hon. C. N. Bruce, is one of the stalwarts of Middlesex, and among the most popular cricketers playing today.

"It is only a few months, curiously enough, since the Hon. Lionel Tennyson, Hampshire's carefree captain, succeeded his father, the late Lord Tennyson.

"We shall, therefore, have the unusual pleasure next summer of seeing two peers playing frequently in county cricket."

The following further headings illustrative of Press "Lordolatry," are taken at random: "VISCOUNT HAPPY AS VICAR" (and why not?); "VISCOUNT IN STAGE CHORUS"; "PEERESSES IN JUNGLE" (nothing new there); "TITLED X-WORD PUZZLE WINNERS" ("Lord Drogheda and Sir Francis Vincent were among the thousands of competitors who solved Lady Katherine Hardy's cross-word puzzle"); "76 YEAR-OLD EARL SINGS 17 SONGS"; "TITLED BAGWOMAN"; "PEER WHO LIVED ON SEAWEED"; "PEER WHO DRIVES A TAXICAB"; "BOXER MARQUIS: BOUT WITH MINER"; "MANNEQUIN TO MARQUISE" (" 'I am not ashamed of having been a mannequin' "—and why should she be, indeed? " 'It gave me an object in life' "); "LORD BRISTOL'S £4 8s. SUIT" (measured and fitted by his wife); together with a whole bagful of Rancher Earls, Electric Earls, Peer Pierrots, Sailor Earls, Boy Scout Earls, Singing Earls and Tea-shop Peeresses.

But the gem of the collection is the following. On the front page of the *Daily Express* (Oct. 2, 1929), granted more or less equal prominence with an announcement of Mr. Arthur Henderson's pact for resumed relations with Russia, of the loss of £20,000,000 on Wall Street, of the cold reception granted to Mr. J. H. Thomas by the House of

Commons on an unemployment speech after his Canadian Tour, we find the heading :

FAMOUS PIGTAILS SACRIFICED
LADY PATRICIA MOORE SHINGLED

Beneath it is the announcement that " the most famous pair of brown pigtails in Great Britain or Ireland (*sic*) have been sacrificed on the altar of fashion."

Now it is no good protesting, " Oh, but that's just the Press ! " The Press knows its job. It knows what its readers want. It knows that many thousands of its readers will be enthralled and astonished by the story of a perfectly good lord leading the life of a perfectly normal individual. The editor of the *Daily Express* knows that quite as many of his readers will be as interested in the shingling of Lady Patricia Moore as in the resumption of trade relations with Russia—probably more. He knows that his women readers will exclaim when they open their copy of the paper that morning : " See that, dear ? Lady Droggeder's daughter's cut her pigtails off. We'll have to be cutting our Gladys's off now she's getting to be such a big girl " ; or " Fancy putting in that sort of stuff ! Fine-looking girl, isn't she ? Here, Bert. Have a look ! " or " See Patsy Moore's cut her pigtails off. 'Bout time too ! "

Society is " news," not just because the newspapers choose to make it " news," but because of that little germ of snobbery that lies hid in everyone. If Messrs. Drage think it worth while to pay Lady Oxford for a full-page testimonial of their furniture, you can depend upon it that there are people who will go flocking to Drage's on the strength of Lady

Oxford alone. If Lord Beaverbrook, in an attempt to boom the Lancashire cotton industry, splashes across two columns on his front page :

COTTON GOWNS FOR ASCOT
SOCIETY WOMEN'S NEW FASHION LEAD
MAYFAIR'S HELP FOR LANCASHIRE
LADY DIANA COOPER'S FROCK

you can take it that the Society way is a pretty good way to boom the Lancashire cotton industry. You can take it, in short, that Society, changed as it is, is still of paramount importance.

Dickens wrote that "representative government is become altogether a failure with us . . . the English gentilities and subserviencies render the people unfit for it." This, even today, is not so very far from the truth. It does not take long for a Socialist minister to turn Conservative in his view of life, while many a business in this country has been ruined by snobbery: by employers who are too high-and-mighty to co-operate with their employees, or who are too busy trying to be gentlemen adequately to look after the interests of their business.

There is a steamer plying on the west coast of Scotland where the first-class lavatories are inscribed "Ladies" and "Gentlemen" and the third-class "Males" and "Females." The social distinctions in our public-houses—a system of partitioning whose principle I have never been able to fathom—provide a phenomenon astonishing to foreigners. The whole system of our social hierarchy is based on snobbery, and no class of the community is altogether free from its toils.

The working classes suffer from it least of all.

The British working man, though he may show due respect (often a hereditary respect) to those whom he believes to be his social superiors, is nothing of a snob in his general attitude to life.

Oddly enough, it comes out in his attitude to death. A poor widow will often spend the whole of her meagre substance on giving her husband a proper funeral. Lady Oxford in her memoirs quotes a letter from a crossing-sweeper :

“Honoured Miss father passed away quite peaceful last Saturday, he set store by his funeral and often told us as much sweeping a crossing had paid him pretty regular, but he left nothing, as one might speak of, and so we was put to it for the funeral, as it throws back so on a house not to bury your father proper,” etc.

The chief reason of the difficulty of obtaining domestic servants has always been the social stigma which is supposedly attached to the position of domestic service, and which led to the portentous suggestion that servants should be called, instead, “Domestic Workers.”

“I have a friend,” wrote a domestic servant when the *Daily Mail* conducted an enquiry into the problem just after the War, “who . . . is now matron of a nursing-home. If I go to see her when there are other people there she is nervous that they will find out that I am a servant, so now I don’t go. I know a butler and his wife who went to a boarding-house for their holiday. Someone found out that they were servants and they were asked to leave.”

One experimental solution of this problem was the introduction of “lady” servants. On the awkward question of tipping which then arose an employer of these hybrid creatures said : “They wouldn’t like

it at all. If anyone stays here some time and likes to send them some grapes or a bunch of flowers, that is quite a different matter." A situation so ludicrously class-conscious could be imagined in no other country!

It is known that in great houses the laws of social precedence in the servants' hall are far more rigorous than they are upstairs, but on the whole it is in the middle classes that the snob-disease is rifest, and the reason why servants complain of the indignity of their social position is that the middle-class snob-housewife never tires of rubbing it in.

In the boarding-houses and suburban villas snobbery becomes an epidemic. Here the phrase, "I'm a better man than you are," refers to social standing and social standing only. Snobbery, the desire to "keep up appearances," to "go one better" than your neighbour, warps the whole attitude towards life of the middle classes. It is largely because of this that, when a financial crash comes, we are perhaps slower to recover than America. We have not that faculty of ruthlessly cutting down our standard of life which the middle-class American has. It matters too much what Mrs. A. next door will say if we give up the car, or the gossip there will be at Mrs. B.'s if we have to do without a servant.

An ex-soldier writing "Why Home Feels Flat" in the *Daily Mail* after the War shed as good a side-light as any on this spirit.

"The narrow outlook doesn't seem to have changed an atom at home," he wrote. "Toryism is not merely political but social. Even the gardener has not mixed with men as I have done during the last ten years. As for the Pater, he literally knows no one outside his 'class' . . . It is because I find in the family atmosphere no sense of the world of fellow mortals outside,

no tolerance of human faults and failings and vulgarity and 'bad form,' no *social*-ism beyond the trivial round of calls and dinner parties that home has turned 'flat.' Home-life is making me homesick . . . for the larger comradeship."

If the War did not alter this, little has occurred since to do so. The social narrowness of villadom, its caste distinctions and general class-consciousness, provide by far the most revealing specimens of the snob germ.

I like particularly the instance of the lady who stayed at an hotel which is run by one of my friends. She objected very strongly to the fact that the proprietor ate in the same dining-room as herself. When it became apparent that she must either put up with this indignity or eat in the passage she had her table so placed that the intervening heads of other guests just prevented her from seeing the horrid sight. And all through her meals she would summon the waitress to move her table now an inch to the left, now to the right, because, when an intervening head changed its position, she had caught a glimpse of the proprietor's jaws closing on a mouthful.

Thackeray would have some fun if he were let loose among the snobs of today! The suburban field would be new to him, but he would not find his Country Snobs much changed; nor his Respectable Snobs, his City Snobs, his Party-giving Snobs, his Dining-out Snobs either. Mrs. Major Ponto is very familiar:

" 'We are distantly related, Mr. Snob,' said she, shaking her melancholy head. 'Poor dear Lord Rubadub!'

" 'Oh!' said I, not knowing what the deuce Mrs. Major Ponto meant.

“ ‘Major Ponto told me you were of the Leicester Snobs : a very old family, and related to Lord Snobbington, who married Laura Rubadub, who is a cousin of mine, as was her poor dear father, for whom we are mourning. What a seizure ! Only sixty-three, and apoplexy quite unknown until now in the family ! In life we are in death, Mr. Snob. Does Lady Snobbington bear the deprivation well ? ’ ”

Despite their altered jargon, Major and Mrs. Ponto are still with us. “ Who,” they will ask, at the mention of any new name, “ was his mother ? ” And, who knows, she may turn out to have been a Balfour of Pilrig !

“ His wife,” said a county lady to an absent-minded friend of mine, “ was a Wallop.”

He seemed startled. “ Dear me ! ” he said vaguely.

Afterwards he asked me, “ What is a wallop ? I ought to know. Is it some kind of albino or hermaphrodite or what ? ”

“ Wallops never have daughters ” is another such remark, recently made to me quite seriously.

The upper middle class (to make snobbish distinctions) is obsessed by its connection, however dubious and remote, with the titled classes. Maiden ladies, all over England, are buoyed up in their spinsterhood by the comforting thought that they are “ kinswomen ” (as the Press has it) of Lord Somebody, and respected by their neighbours accordingly. The “ British Bible,” *Debrett*, lies on their table still.

Their married brother, whose wife supplements the “ British Bible ” with the *Tatler* and devours it eagerly every Wednesday, is principally concerned with giving his sons what is known as a “ gentleman’s education.”

The public schools of all institutions have been most taken to task in this generation. The efficacy of their educational system as applied to modern needs has, in fact, been exploded. Yet thousands of middle-class fathers all over the country are pinching and scraping and enduring privations in order to send their sons to Eton and Harrow. "A gentleman's education!" Can it be worth while, in these times, to sacrifice so much for an anachronism? Or is it snobbery pure and simple?

Not altogether. The fact remains that we are still a privileged country. The passport officer on the Channel boat cannot seriously have thought that I was that venerable statesman, Lord Balfour. He simply thought that I was a lord—which to him would probably have been sufficient talisman in itself—and also bearer of a name which in some dim way he recognized. I was, in his eyes, the member of a privileged class. Therefore, I was not as other men.

There is no doubt that the privileged classes count: that merit within their ranks is quicker to obtain recognition than merit outside them. (I refer to ordinary rather than outstanding merit, which will probably fight its way to the top in any case, independent of class.) As long as this is so it will pay the man who cannot apparently afford to do so to give his son the education of a privileged person. In some businesses, it is true—and the number is increasing—a public-school education will militate against him. But the fact remains that "Influence" still predominates. To get a job, in this country, you must know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody and so forth; and

then you may, with luck, squeeze into the last somebody's office. But if you know nobody, in the first instance, what hope have you? So the middle-class parent still sends his son to a public school, partly from snobbery and vanity, that he may mix with "gentlemen" and the "best in the land"; but mainly because of a system of snobbery which transcends himself, by which the friends his son makes, the personal connections he forms, at school, are the essential foundations of his future career.

In all justice to the public schools, they do not in themselves tend to foster snobbery (though in the school list at Eton all "Honourables" do still bear the prefix of "Mr."). The private schools are less free from it. At my private school, which was more enlightened than most, the masters were so sensible of the dangers of the snob germ that a system of acute inverted snobbery prevailed. On one occasion, I remember, the whole school was summoned in the gymnasium for the purpose of being informed that "Montagu major will in future be known as Hinchbrooke."

The bewilderment of a hundred small boys on being confronted with so startling a piece of information can well be imagined. For no word of explanation was given as to why Montagu major should have elected to be known by so fantastic a name. It was thought, apparently, that, if it were explained to us that Montagu major had come into a title, it would put nasty little snobbish ideas into our heads. And, who knows, perhaps it would!

On the other hand, snobbery in other forms was definitely fostered. I remember a boy being asked what his course of conduct would be towards an

urchin who threw rude remarks at him in the street. The boy very properly replied that he would give him a good kick and send him about his business. But this was quite at variance with the private-school code. The boy was severely reproached for his answer. It was far more dignified, he was told, more gentlemanly, to pay no attention to what rude little boys shouted at you in the street ; to walk past with your head in the air and pretend you hadn't heard.

To be, in fact, a perfect little snob !

Now this our national form of self-indulgence is not, in all its aspects, a vice. Not by any means. At certain times and in certain ways it may indeed be an asset. The German fondness for uniforms helped to consolidate the German Empire. The French *penchant* for hoarding has made France the largest gold-owning country in Europe at the present time. Similarly, our snobbery is in many ways our strength.

During the General Strike in 1926 the newspapers could only produce a single page—hardly bigger than a sheet of foolscap. On the back of this one page one newspaper nevertheless found space to record at some length the divorce proceedings of a peer (who subsequently went to gaol). Even the General Strike was not to interfere with snob news ! Again, we have the following :

COVENT GARDEN PACKED

“ The Grand Opera season at Covent Garden opened on Monday night. The huge auditorium was packed from floor to ceiling, with very few empty seats.

“ The Stalls and Boxes were filled with men in white

ties, and tail coats, but although on the surface the house seemed as brilliant as usual on a close examination it was apparent that the women's dresses had a subdued note and that the true elegance and sparkle of fashion was being reserved for a later and more favourable occasion."

No one can deny that snobbery—for I prefer not to put it down to love of music—is a source of strength when a nation, in the midst of the worst industrial crisis in its history, can calmly continue to go to the opera, simply reserving its *best* clothes for a "later and more favourable occasion" whose advent it never for a moment questions.

Later in the same year, when we were still in the midst of industrial upheavals, I read that "many hostesses who would normally have already given their 'little season' parties are reserving them until industrial tranquillity is restored."

Now is that mere brainless frivolity? Perhaps. On the other hand you can also call it stability.

It is a truism that the more you give people the more they have to lose. The great body of people in this country have the snob germ. They want to lose neither their social position nor their social potentialities. No man will attempt to destroy a social order in which he sees a chance of rising, and each member of the English middle classes sees such a chance for himself. The French Revolution arose from a discontented bourgeoisie which had no such chance of social betterment; the Russian Revolution from the lack of any middle-class backbone at all. But in England we have a bourgeoisie which is perpetually climbing; and which will strongly resist any attempt to kick its ladder away. Moreover,

more and more rungs are added to that ladder as Society becomes less and less exclusive.

Snobbery has assets other than political. It is a form of romanticism, and as such, a release to the imagination. Marcel Proust was a romantic snob. The proud boast of the "Balfours of Pilrig" signifies, fundamentally, a romantic sense, a feeling for race, for history, for what was fine and noble.

Snobbery, above all, signifies respect; and it is here that we arrive at the crux of the whole matter.

Respect for what?

"Reverence is good—if the object of our reverence be worthy thereof," said Gladstone.

Society has changed enormously in the present century, and snobbery has changed with it. The social world has widened. It has rid itself of many of its more absurd and artificial barriers, and today almost every man is a potential member of Society.

This, at first sight, might appear to be a change for the better. Whether or not it is so in fact is our business to explore.

But it has had one very definite effect. Instead of decreasing snobbery it has increased it. It has widened its field to an almost unlimited extent. Snobbery of birth and breeding has been superseded, or, rather, augmented by a whole bagful of other snobberies.

People say that, in 1932, Society is no longer important. This is bunkum. As long as we remain a snobbish nation, so long will Society be important. And we are still a snobbish nation.

Society is dead: long live Society!

Far from being dead Society is become a more important problem than ever she was in the past.

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF MODERN SOCIETY

' Plus ça change . . . '—Rise of the middle classes—Queen Victoria's influence—Effects of mechanical development—The " American Invasion "—Edwardian materialism—" Concertina-process " of the social revolution.

IN the old time English girls were content to be what God and Nature had made them. Of late years we have changed the pattern, and have given to the world a race of women as utterly unlike the old insular ideal as if we had created another nation altogether. The girl of the period and the fair young English girl of the past have nothing in common save ancestry and their mother-tongue ; and even of this last the modern version makes almost a new language, through the copious additions it has received from the current slang of the day. The girl of the period is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion ; whose sole idea of life is plenty of fun and luxury, and whose dress is the object of such thought and intellect as she possesses."

The usual attack on the modern girl : certainly. Written when ?

In 1868.

It concludes :

" All we can do is to wait patiently until the national madness has passed and our women have come back again to the old English ideal, once the most beautiful,

the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world."

We have grown so accustomed to jeremiads upon the manners and morals of modern Society that we have come almost to accept them as peculiar to our time. It does not occur to us that they are such ancient history.

At the time the above article in the *Saturday Review* caused its sensation, Mr. Gladstone and Mrs. Humphry Ward had already been shaking their two heads together over the morals of the girls of their day.

But they were simply echoing the headshakings of previous generations. Was not the present much-abused cocktail age preceded by the age of port, the age of gin, the age of sack, the age of mead? Did not the waltz, when it came to England in 1815, horrify the dowagers of the period so that many of them would not permit their daughters to dance any but square dances? Did not the quadrille and the polka offend equally against propriety? Polkamania was every bit as rife in the 'forties as jazzmania in the nineteen-twenties. Even the introduction of coffee after luncheon in the 'sixties caused a to-do; and when tea came in, girls made up furtive parties to drink it behind locked doors in their bedrooms. In the 'eighties tight waists were the fashion—otherwise slimming.

In the 'nineties the "New Woman" was taken to task in the same way as the "Girl of the Period" had been thirty years before and as the "Modern Girl" was thirty years later. Marie Corelli plunged into newsprint in an onslaught on Society:

"Among the many ages or periods in this world's existence," she writes, "it is doubtful whether there

has ever been one which has so richly merited the pre-eminent and prominent label of 'sham' writ across it as this."

She describes how "heirs to a great name and title sell their birthright for a mess of American dollar-pottage," and quotes a piece of "modern" dialogue which, while one can hardly regard it as typical of its day, is worth reproducing if only as a curiosity in slang :

HE : I heard a lot this season about the way you were going on with that poor devil of a So-and-so—people said you were fond of him, dontcher-know.

SHE (*casually*) : Did they? So I was. Awfully fond. But he hadn't got any oof-bird.

HE : Oh ! Then I suppose he's "off?"

SHE : Off? I should think so ! Why (*this with deep contempt*) he's become a *digger*.

HE (*laughing*) : Costume will suit him down to the ground. Rather good-looking fellow—fine figure and all that—jolly sort of chap. I say, then, if he's "off" I'm on—eh?

SHE : If you like. I told you it would be all right when your governor died. Couldn't settle up till then. He might have lived ever so long.

HE : So he might. But he hasn't. He's gone, sure enough. Then it's a tie?

SHE : It's a tie. No—don't kiss me—I don't feel like it.

HE (*chuckling*) : Don't you? Well, I suppose you have got to be taken in the humour. I don't feel like it either, now I come to think of it.

SHE : I'm quite sure you don't. It's so idiotic, you know.

HE : I bet you kissed the *digger* fellow. Come, didn't you?

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SHE : I may have done. I don't remember. Anyhow, it isn't your business. I want some ices.

HE : Waiter ! Ices ! And a brandy-and-soda !

[*Slow music. Song by nigger minstrels : " Won't yer ketch i'm when yer sees 'im."*]

CURTAIN

A typical modern pair, while they too would employ a nigger accompaniment, would, I feel, be somewhat differently situated. SHE would have refused the fellow with the " oof-bird " and would be planning either matrimony on nothing a year or an alternative relationship with the " poor devil of a So-and-so " of whom she is so " awfully fond."

A surprising number of the cuttings of that period read as though they had been written today. Here, for example, is Lady St. Helier, taking up cudgels for the modern woman—of the 'nineties :

" In a community where the female element is largely in excess of the male, and where modern thought and education have raised them intellectually on a more equal basis, it was not possible for women to remain the colourless, dependent creatures of the past. And as they have become emancipated they have more or less chosen their own careers, and thousands of women are now living proofs of the advantages of a change that has given them an aim in life which they can pursue successfully."

And the writer goes on to comment on the increasing " mannishness " of women in dress and behaviour.

As regards changes of fashion, this paragraph of 1904 might—except for the " dating " of the phrase,

“classes” and “masses”—have been written by any gossip-writer of the 'twenties or 'thirties :

“The old-time glories of the Academy private view seem to be diminishing, slowly, very slowly, year by year. In bygone days one heard so much of the celebrities to be met there, to say nothing of the marvellous spring fashions to be seen ; but, like most functions at the present time, the masses rush in where at one time only the classes dared tread, and the term ‘exclusive’ is dying an easy death.”

Cocktails were being freely drunk at the beginning of the century. R. D. Blumenfeld records in his *Diary* (1901) that he observed four women smoking cigarettes unconcernedly in the Carlton Lounge, and adds that most women now smoke at home and become “nervy” as a result. Another passage in the same *Diary* refers to “scorching,” apparently by no means the most modern of traffic vices, and reads very curiously today :

“Lord Carnarvon is becoming a public nuisance as a motor scorcher. He was summoned again today. Clouds of dust as high as the neighbouring trees, said the police witnesses, rose up as his car whizzed along the road. By careful timing and measurements the superintendent calculated the rate of speed at a mile in two-and-a-half minutes, or twenty-four miles an hour !

“Frank Butler, the honorary secretary of the Automobile Club in Piccadilly, is very angry with the police. They haled him before the New Romney magistrates yesterday for scorching in his new Panhard at eighteen miles per hour ; but he got off.”

But the trump card of the modern generation against the Edwardians, who with their constant cry of “That could never have happened in *our*

day," are the most vociferous critics of modern social habits, is a cutting from *Truth* referring to gate-crashers in 1908 :

"WITHOUT A WEDDING GARMENT

"Is it better to entertain the uninvited without a murmur, or to run the risk of offending friends by calling upon them to produce their credentials when they make their appearance at one's parties? This is not a silly season conundrum but a burning question of the moment. Incredible as it seems, there are persons so constituted that they will force their way into houses where entertainments are in progress, have supper and afterwards refer to the fact that they were at So-and-So's party. The risk of detection is small ; a hostess with a hundred or more guests may see an unfamiliar face or two and wonder, but she can do little else without fear of giving offence. But some means ought to be contrived to render such vulgar imposition impossible."

Nothing is new. Moreover cuttings such as these are more than mere curiosities. They portray no accidental phases ; they punctuate a logical course of development.

One is apt to regard "modern society" as a kind of fortuitous offshoot of the Great War. But modern society is a far, far older lady than the War. She is in fact, almost to the year, a centenarian. Modern society was conceived at the Industrial Revolution, stirred restlessly in the womb during the early years of the nineteenth century, and was born into the world, a sturdy, bouncing middle-class child, in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-two.

"The moment the Lords passed the Reform Bill," said Disraeli, ". . . the aristocratic principle of government expired for ever."

In 1832 the middle classes became once and for all a recognized entity. Subsequent social history is simply the history of their gradual rise in the social scale until, in the nineteen-thirties, they reach their present apotheosis.

Of course it was a slow process. Even comparatively late in the century the Duke of Bedford was cynically advised to count his spoons when John Bright went to Woburn, while Lady Jersey's butler displayed the strongest disapproval of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's presence as a guest in her ladyship's house. It took a long time to break the barriers of the great Whig and Tory families. But that the New Snob was well on the way by the Roaring 'Forties is indicated by Thackeray, whose *Snob Papers* are still unsurpassed. His indomitable Lady de Mogyns is the forbear of many a modern hostess :

"When that ojou, disguised Irishwoman, Lady Muggins, was struggling to take her place in the world, and was bringing out her hidjous daughter Blanche," said old Lady Clapperclaw, . . . "when that wretched Polly Muggins was bringing out Blanche, with her radish of a nose, and her carrots of ringlets, and her turnip for a face, she was most anxious—as her father had been a cowboy on my father's land—to be patronised by us, and asked me pointblank, in the midst of a silence at Count Volauvent's, the French Ambassador's dinner, why I had not sent her a card for my ball ?

" 'Because my rooms are already too full, and your ladyship would be crowded inconveniently,' says I—indeed she takes up as much room as an elephant ; besides, I wouldn't have her, and that was flat.

"I thought my answer was a settler to her ; but the next days she comes weeping to my arms. 'Dear Lady Clapperclaw,' says she, 'it's not for *me* ; I ask

it for my blessed Blanche! A young creature in her first season, and not at your ball! My tender child will pine and die of vexation. *I don't want to come. I will stay at home to nurse Sir Alured in the gout. Mrs. Bolster is going, I know; she will be Blanche's chaperon.*

" ' You wouldn't subscribe for the Rathdrum blanket and potato fund—you, who come out of the parish,' says I, ' and whose grandfather, honest man, kept cows there.'

" ' Will twenty guineas be enough, dearest Lady Clapperclaw ? '

" ' Twenty guineas is sufficient,' says I, and she paid them; so I said, ' Blanche may come, but not you, mind.' And she left me with a world of thanks.

" Would you believe it?—when my ball came, the horrid woman made her appearance with her daughter! ' Didn't I tell you not to come ? ' said I, in a mighty passion. ' What would the world have said ? ' cries my Lady Muggins. ' My carriage is gone for Sir Alured to the Club; let me stay only ten minutes, dearest Lady Clapperclaw.'

" ' Well, as you are here, madam, you may stay and get your supper,' I answered, and so left her, and never spoke a word more to her all night."

Lady de Mogyns slowly but indefatigably mounts the ladder.

" ' And now,' screamed out old Lady Clapperclaw, clapping her hands, and speaking with more brogue than ever, ' what do you think, after all my kindness to her, the wicked, vulgar, odious, impudent upstart of a cowboy's granddaughter has done?—she cut me yesterday in Hy' Park, and hasn't sent me a ticket for her ball to-night, though they say Prince George is to be there.' "

It has been said that Thackeray's aristocrats were not the true aristocrats. But this only emphasizes

the change which was proceeding. Previously there had been no mongrel aristocrats. Now that breed existed, and obviously it was only a question of time before it was mistaken for the true.

Through it all sat the old Duke of Wellington, realizing that the old order was doomed, but striving to keep the balance and uphold the Throne, throwing in his weight, now on one side, now on the other, to save what could be saved. So does his less celebrated grandson, the 4th Duke, together with many of his class, sit and contemplate the same changes, two stages further on.

The Court of Queen Victoria assisted immeasurably the rise of the middle classes, and indeed it was Queen Victoria herself who saved Society's very existence. For, with middle-class sympathies she combined the dignity and aloofness of a monarch. The middle classes revered her and, at the same time, regarded her almost as one of them. Thus they aspired, not to overthrow the established aristocratic order for which she stood, but to become absorbed within it. Another pleasure-loving Hanoverian like George IV, perched on the throne during those momentous nineteenth-century years, might have brought a very different social outcome. Thanks to Queen Victoria we still have, today, an aristocracy, depending on the monarchy, which in theory is the same as it has always been though in fact its members are largely of middle-class origin. Without her it is conceivable that we might now have been a middle-class republic, with no aristocracy left; for at the time of the Reform Bill, there were many who thought that the monarchy was in real danger.

Cobden, whose avowed aim it was to "take away

power from the landed oligarchy and place it in the hands of the intelligent middle and industrious classes," helped to accelerate the social revolution. The repeal of the Corn Laws was another nail in the coffin of the old order.

But though the repeal of the Corn Laws decreased the political power of land its possession was still an important social asset. The first thing that these traders and bankers and brewers and cotton brokers would do was to build or buy an estate. Land was the essential aerodrome for a rise in the social scale. Thus a new landed class arose ; and meanwhile with Sir William Harcourt's Budget of 1894, there began that break-up of the old landed estates which was so to be accelerated by the Great War.

The development of railways was another revolutionary landmark, whose principal effect was the centralization of Society. County and provincial towns, which had formerly had a Society of their own, ceased to be socially important. County people came to London for their social intercourse, and the result was a considerable increase in the size, and consequently the latitude, of Society. Thus did we begin to be London-dwellers.

Railway promoters became people of social significance. Queen Victoria allowed herself to be entertained by Hudson, the Railway King, whose ultimate defalcation ruined so many, and business men abounded at parties in London. Society established contact with the City, and there followed the great boom in railway speculation in the 'forties in which half the aristocracy burnt its fingers. Since then Society's connection with business has progressively increased. In the 'eighties came a further

speculating rage, and now younger sons began to go into City firms. Even trade was not too lowly, and the wine business was looked upon as quite a suitable occupation for a gentleman. Though young gentlemen did not yet serve in shops, as they do today, they owned them.

In the 'eighties and 'nineties came the Rand millionaires and the beginning of the recognition of Jews as a feature of English Society. Now too began the "American Invasion."

The Victorian Court, especially in the last half of the century, was never "smart" or amusing. Only the middle classes followed its fashions, and the greater number of Queen Victoria's friends were drawn from the middle classes, not from the old aristocracy. The latter gathered round the Prince of Wales, whose circle was considerably leavened by the introduction of numbers of the new rich whom he could not afford to disregard. Thus on either hand you had a broadening effect: the English middle classes rising through their contact with the Court, the upper classes extending their circle downwards to include the American and South African millionaires.

The Americans had already begun to pay vast prices for our art treasures. The Beckett-Denison collection fetched £71,000 in 1885, the Dudley collection £101,000 in 1892, and the Hawkins collection £190,000 in 1904; and most of this money was from America. As soon as King Edward ascended the throne, they became a social factor which could not be ignored. It was said of King Edward by a prominent American citizen: "The Americans were social pariahs in England; his late Majesty has made England their social paradise."

Through his influence they came in in shoals. Many became important figures in Society while the number who married into our great families was considerable. Lady Randolph Churchill "set the fashion" as early as 1874. Others were Lady Harcourt, Lady Curzon, Lady Essex, Lady Craven and Mrs. Arthur Paget; while in the Edwardian Age American brides came thick and fast. But this is anticipating.

The death of Lady Palmerston meant the end of Whig entertaining in its old narrow sense, and Lady Waldegrave, on whom her mantle fell, was sufficiently up-to-date to recognize the change and welcome it. She was the first great hostess to do so:

"Then of a sudden, as it were," writes Lady St. Helier, "the conventional rules were swept away, and those who had the courage and appreciation to open their houses to everyone who was interesting and distinguished found an ideally delightful Society waiting for its new entertainers."

So did Society begin to mix with painters, actors, writers, and scientific workers—though still only with discrimination, with those particularly eminent in their profession.

Lady St. Helier shows us the other side of the picture as well. Of the "smart set" in the 'nineties, which was to set the standards of Edwardian Society as a whole, she wrote at the time:

"Society now runs mad after anyone who can get himself talked of, and that not in the sole direction of great ability or distinction. To have a good cook, to be the smartest dressed woman, to give the most magnificent entertainments where a fortune is spent on flowers and decorations, to be the last-favoured guest of Royalty, or to have sailed as near to the wind

of social disaster as is compatible with not being shipwrecked, are a few of the features which characterise some of the smartest people in London Society. It must be admitted that these qualifications are not high or difficult to attain to, while the training ground is large and well studded with instructors."

Such was the social life of the 'eighties and 'nineties, and the foretaste of what was to come ; of which even Lady Warwick, who was an integral part of it, admits :

" Had Lady Paget lived in the present day, it is pretty certain that she, with her active mind and gift for friendship, would have found some outlet for her abounding vitality other than the round of frivolous engagements and entertaining which formed such a large part of social life in England in the 'eighties and 'nineties."

And so we come to the much-vaunted Edwardian Age, that orgy of unenlightened materialism of which the truth remains still to be written.

It is fashionable, today, to romanticize the Edwardian Age. The Edwardians themselves are never tired of contrasting its glories and its virtues with the abandoned vulgarity of the present day ; and even our own generation is to a certain extent taken in by the great Edwardian legend. Yet Edwardian Society, with its grossness of appetite, its lavish display of wealth and luxury, is surely equalled for vulgarity only by the nineteen-thirties ? It has been described as an age of peace and plenty. It was, rather, an age of boredom and excess.

The Edwardians were a gluttonous crew. They spent half their time eating prodigious, rich meals, the other half devising means of increasing their wealth. The limit of their intellectual activity was bridge or baccarat. " The Souls," the world which Lady

Oxford describes, are the exception which prove the rule. They were formed as a means of escape from this stupid materialism which had taken firm root while King Edward was still Prince of Wales. Precious "the Souls" may have been; complacent and self-conscious they would doubtless seem to us now. But any rate they admitted a scale of intellectual values, to which the rest of Society was deaf.

Their normal conversation was quite as uninteresting as conversation in Society today:

¹ " 'What was Miriam's party like, Lucy? Sticky, as usual?' 'No,' said Lucy, 'quite a good party for once, but of course nothing will ever make poor Miriam into a good hostess.' 'Millions don't make a salon.' 'Are you lunching with Celia tomorrow, Lucy?' 'Yes,—are you? What fun. Who else is going, do you know?' 'Tommy, you're going, aren't you? How too deevy. We'll all be able to laugh at Celia in a corner. And let me see—tomorrow evening is Stafford House, isn't it? Deevy parties at Stafford House, always. And Millie looking like a goddess, with a golden train half-way down the stairs. The charm of that woman! Everybody will be there.' 'Violet really ought to be stopped from giving parties. There ought to be an Act of Parliament about it. Friday was ghastly.' 'Ghastly! Horribilino! And the filthiest food.' 'Where are you going to stay for Ascot?' . . . Then investments bulked heavy in their talk, and other people's incomes, and the merits of various stocks and shares; also the financial shrewdness of Mrs. Cheyne . . ."

It was an age of snobbery. The brilliant figures of the reign were not its artists or men of intellect but social figures: its famous beauties and millionaires. The Victorian Age means Browning, Tennyson, Darwin, Dickens. The Edwardian Age, apart

¹ *The Edwardians*, by V. Sackville-West.

from its politicians, means Mrs. George Keppel and the Duchess of Sutherland and the Cornwallis-Wests and the Rothschilds. Partly this was the backwash of that worship of beauty in the luxurious 'eighties, which Moreton Trewen¹ describes as "the very apogee of mindless idleness," and which had failed, owing to the extravagances of Wilde and his satellites, to turn into a genuine æsthetic revival. But mainly it was Social. Moreover it was Society for Society's sake; for Society no longer had the remotest influence in politics or in anything else of importance.

And they were not even grand snobs. Their snobbery was vulgar. The Society weeklies of those days far transcend in their futility anything that is written today. *The World* alone had thirty columns of social chit-chat weekly. Moreover it was of the dullest variety such as no modern editor would print, consisting as it did simply of lists of titled persons seen at charity concerts or at parties or in the Park or at race-meetings. "Belle's Letters," in which the great social figures of that day liked to be mentioned and to have their dresses described, is nauseous in its unabashed and luscious snobism. Yet it was devoured, week after week, by the "best people" in Society.

The proud boast of the Edwardians is their exclusiveness. But on what principles were they exclusive? They were not even consistent in that. Miss V. Sackville-West's Anquetil, pondering over the world of the élite,

"began to wonder what qualities gave admission to it, for he had already noticed that no definite principle appeared to dictate selection . . . he could perceive

¹ *Mellon Mowbray and other memories.*

no common factor between all these people ; neither high birth nor wealth nor brains seemed to be essential—so Anquetil in his simplicity had thought—for though Sir Adam was fabulously rich, Tommy Brand was correspondingly poor ; and though the Duchess of Hull was a Duchess, Mrs. Levison was by birth and marriage a nobody ; and though Lord Robert Gore was a clever, ambitious young man, Sir Harry Tremaine was undeniably a ninny. Yet they all took their place with the same assurance, and upon the same footing. . . . Some of these women were harsh-faced, and lacked both charm and wit ; their only virtue, a glib conversance with such topics as came up for discussion and a manner of delivering themselves as though the final word had been uttered on the subject. If this is Society, thought Anquetil, God help us, for surely no fraud has ever equalled it. . . . Well, . . . they spend money, and that is the best that can be said for them."

Elinor Glyn's Elizabeth was told that "everyone was a gentleman now who paid for things." Of "Mrs. Pike, the new Colonial millionairess," her hostess remarks :

"Horrid creature, as unnecessary as can be !" and when asked why she had invited her, "she said her sister-in-law, Carry, had got round Tom, as she was running them. . . . I asked Jane Roos what 'running them' means, and it's being put on to things in the City, and having all your bills paid if you introduce them to people ; only you sometimes have to write their letters for them to prevent them putting the whole grand address, etc., that is in the Peerage ; and she says it is quite a profession now, and done by the best people."

From *The Visits of Elizabeth* also comes the following illuminating remark :

"... he is ridiculously old-fashioned and particular, and actually in London won't go to places unless he knows the host and hostess personally."

One does not accept such a book as a completely authoritative picture of the times. It was not intended to be. But there is no smoke without fire. Baron Hirsch remarked to Margot Asquith that "London Society cares more for money than any other in the world, as I know to my cost."

Another distinguished foreigner is quoted in *Truth* (June 30, 1904), by "Marmaduke," the shrewdest social chronicler of the day, in the following opinion of English Society :

"Your 'society' now reminds me of the dishes served at some restaurants; the raw material is abominable, but it is arranged with rich-coloured sauces which make it look especially excellent. In the West End streets, drawing-rooms and theatres I meet men and women who are faultlessly dressed, but there is an obvious absence of distinction about them, their manners are distressing, and their conversation shows that they never received a first-class education. The magnificent carriages, the precious gems, and the exquisite dresses seem to have been assumed by those for whom they were not originally provided.

"The test of the intellectual condition of a nation is its conversation. Talk without trouble is apparently your motto in this direction now. The morning newspaper supplies the material for the talk of the day. . . . There is never a trace of intelligence or originality, and if there were it would be instantly discouraged, for the brains of most of your West End men and women of today could not endure the strain, and besides, as many of them are but half-educated, they would certainly be unable to appreciate it.

"But talk of money, and in an instant every face lights up, an eager look comes into the eyes, and it is seen that there is a reserve of intelligence—it is Money Intelligence."

He ends his criticism with a remark which has a decidedly post-war ring :

“ There is a play called ‘ High Life below Stairs ’ ; rewrite it, my friend, rewrite it—and alter the title to ‘ Low Life above Stairs ! ’ ”

But one must not be too hard on the Edwardians. As we shall find later on, their Society was no worse than that of the present time, and in some respects it was not as bad. They boasted more genuine “ personalities ” than we can today. As far as morals went, they reduced hypocrisy to an art, and so contrived to keep up the reputation of Society in the public mind ; and that was something achieved. But with today’s increased sources of publicity their reputations would not have stood a chance.

They were certainly generous with their money, although on the whole they spent it so stupidly. Lord Rothschild used to give each of the London omnibus drivers a brace of pheasants every Christmas—an aristocratic gesture for which one would search in vain for a parallel today. Undoubtedly they had a certain grandeur of style. Even their eccentrics and jokers had it, in a manner with which one cannot credit their successors of the ’twenties. No one has succeeded the Beresford brothers. I discovered the other day that a remark, attributed to a modern wit (and a true wit), Lord Berners, was in fact made by Lord Charles Beresford. Some snobbish people were telling him how they had been to a newly opened restaurant. They complained of the service, the crowd, the discourtesy, the food, everything. “ Really,” they said, “ I don’t think they can have known who we were.”

“ And who were you ? ” asked Lord Charles (or Lord Berners ?) quietly.

Edwardian entertainments were in the grand

manner. The famous fancy dress balls at Stafford House and Warwick Castle (the latter in 1895, but of the Edwardian Era), when a young artist fainted on beholding the Duchess of Sutherland's beauty, must go down to history as some of the finest parties ever given. Alfred Rothschild's entertainments at Halton, with his private orchestra and circus, and Tring, where the gardens were changed in a night for King Edward's benefit, were in many respects worthy of the eighteenth century.

But even there, one has the impression that food played a part more important than conversation. One of the famous dishes was baby pheasants, too young to fly, who had had their necks wrung, so Mr. George Cornwallis-West¹ tells us; and he describes a sumptuous tea, after which "the more sensible members went for a walk to overcome the effects of lunch and prepare for dinner; those less sensible walked down the hill and played bridge till dressing-time." The Edwardians spent a good deal of their time "overcoming the effects of lunch and preparing for dinner"—or overcoming the effects of both, and thus putting fortunes into German hands at Schwallbach, Kissingen, Nauheim, Kreuznach, Homburg and other forgotten Spas. They needed a satirist, another Thackeray to castigate them as he had castigated their fathers.

There can be no true grandeur without a background of true culture. But the unabashed materialism of the Edwardians is understandable, coming as it did in reaction to the ponderous moral idealism of the Victorians.

Also the social revolution was slowly undermining

¹ *Edwardian Hey-days.*

them, and many knew it. The late Duke of Sutherland could still pin £1000 notes to his wife's pillow while she slept. But he foresaw the social and financial changes. He started early to dispose of property, and Stafford House was the first of the big London mansions to go, in the days before the War when Devonshire House and the rest seemed safe for perpetuity. Lord and Lady Warwick turned their estates into a limited liability company as early as 1899. Life interests in their Warwickshire, Essex, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire estates, the lease of Clutton collieries and insurance policies on their lives were registered under the title of the Warwick Estates Company Ltd., with a capital of £120,000. Thus they were pioneers of a policy which, a quarter of a century later, was to become almost universal among big landowners. At the time the "companification" of the ducal family in *The Gondoliers* was recalled—not alone among Gilbert's prophetic utterances on the changes in the social order.

Liberalism was causing the middle classes to thrive at the expense of the old aristocracy. (Though, paradoxically enough, it was as Conservatives that the beneficiaries declared themselves. Only thus could they become associated with the fashionable aristocracy which they were helping to destroy!) It was simply the logical continuation of the process which had begun in 1832 and had been slowly maturing throughout the nineteenth century. Where the big merchants and bankers and brewers had triumphed now the smaller shopkeepers were following in their wake. The shopkeeper was replacing the squire. The capital of the country was being drained

out of the soil into the street. The poorer nobility could not now keep up the conditions of life to which they had been accustomed in the past. Their poor relations, who could no longer depend on them, gradually became absorbed into the middle class. The rich aristocracy sensed the prospect of becoming poorer rather than richer. Though many could foresee no end to their plenty, and money was still no problem, it became a topic. No one could afford to disregard it ; which is to say that they could not afford to disregard those who had it in greater abundance than themselves.

By 1914, then, the concertina process, the general levelling up and levelling down which was to transform the post-war social world, was already, though perhaps imperceptibly, far advanced. Society, however, was still a limited body compared with what it was to become, and half the people who were successfully to claim admission to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot after the War did not then regard it as their right.

Many of the symptoms which I have quoted were no more than phases, untypical of the whole spirit of their time. But then nor is the newspaper picture of Society today typical of all its phases. The fact that those symptoms are discoverable at all shows that modern society is a gradual and logical growth. It may, owing to a European War, have shot up with alarming rapidity at a certain stage in its development. But the child of 1832 is still father to the man of 1932.

Hence, when we talk, in future, of "Modern Society," we refer to no *parvenu*, but to a creature that can trace an unbroken lineage back through some four generations.

CHAPTER II

THE ROARING 'TWENTIES

An age of transition : turbulent and vital—Post-war Oxford—Old and new together—Analogy of the Roaring 'Forties—And now the 'Thirties !

AND now for the 'twenties—the Roaring 'Twenties ! I am aware that it is the privilege of middle age to sentimentalize the past, to play the “ good old days ” as a conversational trump card. I am aware, too, that these “ good old days ” are commonly no more than the days in which the middle-aged were richer, younger and in better health. Hence it will seem an affectation on my part to talk about “ the good old days,” way back in the nineteen-twenties.

It is not. For, in the 'twenties, did not every man, however rich, feel richer ; did not every man and woman, however young, feel younger ? And the popular song of the 'thirties is “ Ain't it grand to be bloomin' well dead ! ”

The bores are never tired of bleating about “ changing London.” *Tempora mutantur* is the monotonous chant of the wisecracks. We have seen that Society does not change, fortuitously ; that it merely follows a general line of change over a long period. Nevertheless, during that period, one epoch may be completely different in spirit from another,

as each individual change makes itself felt, and as one reacts from another. So, for instance, did the 'seventies differ from the 'nineties, and the pre-war from the post-war age. But now the post-war age is gone, and its discrepancy with the decade we live in is as distinct as any gulf between post-war and pre-war. With the nineteen-thirties we are into a new epoch. The 'twenties are behind us for ever.

The 'twenties did overlap a bit into the 'thirties ; but petering out, like a Volga Boat Song, whose final chord was the crash from gold. On September 21st, 1931, the 'twenties came to a full stop. The minstrels packed their instruments and went the way of the pound. Ichabod, as the bores would say ; or R.I.P.

Now when I talk of changes I do not refer merely to the growth of a lid and another pair of wheels upon the body of the London omnibus ; nor to the appearance on the streets of taxi-cabs which can usually be relied upon not to come away in your hand ; nor even to the haphazard and formless slabs of concrete pretentiousness which, masquerading under the misnomer of modernity, have supplanted so much of what was best in London's architecture. When I speak of the end of an epoch I do not necessarily imply the onrush of Americanism which is alleged to have swamped our English life. In a sense I mean all of these things ; in essence I mean none of them.

I do mean the change which has come over the whole social order. Social London, in the 'thirties, is quite a different place from what it was in the 'twenties. Society in its old sense has ceased to exist. The social climber changed in character ; for



Twenties



'Thirties

Society has climbed down. I remember, at the time of the greyhound racing craze, a tale of a contest between a certain young man and a Chelsea hostess in pursuit of an electric lion. The young man won the race because the woman would keep turning round to explain to the spectators that she had known the lion as a cub. That story is now "dated." It is a period joke of the 'twenties which makes little sense today. For there are no lions.

The great houses—Devonshire, Grosvenor, Dorchester, and the rest—are gone, and with them the principle of large-scale formal entertaining for which they stood.

The blushing *débutante* is as dead as the English breakfast in Mayfair. Chaperonage is a luxury which no mother can afford since the new poor have become the old poor and the new rich the new poor. The divisions of Society are simplified: not merely have the social distinctions disappeared, but the discrepancies between old and young, the subdivisional hierarchy of "debs," unmarried girls, "young marrieds," and dowagers. Today, when all are "young," you have simply the married and the unmarried, and even they are but relative terms.

The "London Season" is very different from what it was in Edwardian days. Those words, in the 'thirties, have ceased to denote any specific period. The London Season goes on all—or, if you prefer it, none—of the time.

Time was when the family, towards the end of April, would pack up its trunks, distribute dust sheets and moth balls around its country palace, collect its twenty servants and move wholesale to

London. The social chroniclers would write : " The blinds are going up in Belgrave Square. . . ." But now the blinds in Belgrave Square are up all the time (or down all the time, as the case may be). There used to be a joke about impoverished families living behind drawn blinds in August and September lest people discover the degrading secret that they could not afford to go away. That joke, like those old jokes in *Punch* which end "(collapse of Stout Party)", no longer makes sense. Today people can no more afford to leave London than they can afford to live there. They must be on the spot, that they may make enough money to overspend their incomes.

So the calendar has changed. You return to London from Scotland in October. You find the theatres and the restaurants packed and hear of a dozen parties. Towards the beginning of December the social columns tell you, " The little season reached its climax last night when Lady Cunard . . . "

You return to London after your Christmas holiday. You find the theatres and the restaurants packed and hear of two dozen parties. Towards Easter the social columns tell you, " The little season reached its climax last night when Lady Cunard and Mrs. William Corey . . . "

Why " little " ? The Embassy and the Ritz are just as crowded in the " little " season as they are in May and June. The only difference between the parties is that in the spring and autumn the invitations are on visiting cards marked, " very small dance " in ink, while in the summer they are on larger cards with " Dancing " engraved in the corner. In either event the guests are precisely similar in quantity, quality, dress, conversation and smell.

The difference is no longer one of degree, only of nomenclature.

The term "London Season" will survive, just as people still continue to call themselves dukes and marquesses and counts under the French Republic. But it will mean no more than the "Lambing Season" does to the industrialist or the "Football Season" to the man who lives in the South of France. So too will the landmarks of the season survive. But as the years roll on they will assume more and more the mien of curious historical survivals, like tossing the pancake or the Dunmow Flitch, whose original significance is forgotten. As it is, you visit Ascot and Lord's with the feeling that you are dressing for a theatrical performance, only the costumes are by Lesley and Roberts, not Clarkson's. And who knows, "Lord's" may mean very little more to our grandchildren than it did to the Frenchman who timidly asked what it was all about when another Eton wicket fell and the ground broke into a volcanic roar. They told him. He brightened. "*Alors,*" he said, "*c'est Harrods qui gagne.*"

To process through the London Season today is like walking along the front at Brighton or up the High at Oxford, where occasionally an untouched Regency building or the "dreaming spire" of a college punctuates the irregular modern outline and recalls the calm dignity of a previous age amid the bustle of the new.

In so far as the 'twenties can be defined they were a period of change: from quails in aspic to eggs and bacon, from champagne to lager, from coal fires to electricity, from mansions to mansion flats, and

from balls to cocktail parties ; an age in the course of which peers became Socialists and Socialists became peers, actors and actresses tried to be ladies and gentlemen and ladies and gentlemen behaved like actors and actresses, novelists were men-about-town and men-about-town wrote novels, persons of rank became shopkeepers and shopkeepers drew persons of rank to their houses, the Speed King supplanted the Guards officer as the *beau ideal* of modern woman and modern woman herself grew each day slimmer and slimmer—and slimmer.

It was in every sense an age of transition, and therein lies its virtue. For it had the best of both worlds : the remaining dignity of an aristocratic order combined with the luxuries of a cosmopolitan machine-civilization ; the Spanish Embassy *and* the Embassy Club, Norfolk House *and* the Blue Lantern, the Russian Ballet *and* the Prince of Wales in butter at Wembley. It was an age in which the traditions of the old dovetailed into the ideas of the new.

The 'twenties were a turbulent epoch, but vital. We fiddled while London burned. We ate, we drank, we were merry, for we knew that today we should die. We counted not the cost. We spent our capital which would now be worth nothing anyway. It was our final fling—but I have used up all the *clichés*. How otherwise can I recapture the recklessness, the youth, the lavishness, the carefree hospitality of the Roaring 'Twenties ?

I knew it first at Oxford ; for in the 'twenties Oxford still had a personality of her own. Our fathers told us, when we went up to Oxford, that these would be the best years of our life. And maybe it was the last time that phrase will ever

apply to Oxford. Our fathers spoke truer than they thought. They simply repeated the words that their fathers had spoken before them. They could not know what the 'twenties meant and what the 'thirties were to mean.

Today Oxford, socially, is a mere suburb of London. She must needs draw on the metropolis for her amusement because she is thoroughly bored with herself. God forbid that we should ever have been bored with Oxford! We were a self-contained society, and there was merit in that even if it was only the æsthetic merit of picturesqueness. We learnt the art of doing nothing gracefully. We wore high-necked jumpers and "Oxford bags." I believe that the first person to wear a high-necked jumper at Oxford was Mr. Antony Hornby, though it cannot have been long after that I was deprived of mine at a bump supper, together with a portion of my trousers! (Afterwards I claimed and was duly awarded £1 10s. damages from the Junior Common Room. I know of no other case where a victim of de-bagging has been thus reimbursed!)

At Oxford we wasted time and money; but we did so with a glorious and reckless abandon. We resented intrusions from the outside world; for we had our own Personalities. Some of them have made their mark since. Some have gone to the dogs, others to the fogs. But they *were* Personalities, if only for a short and glamorous reign, within the walls of Oxford itself. Today, in the 'thirties, Oxford has no Cæsars at all. She does not even get drunk. This seems a sad state of affairs to us old-stagers, when we look back upon the Oxford of the 'Roaring 'Twenties.

Those were the days. The Hypocrites' Club, where we drank as they never drank in pre-war Russia. The Railway Club, where, under the auspices of Mr. John Sutro, we drank on trains. That was a conception typical of the Roaring 'Twenties. In what other age would a dozen young men put on full evening dress in order to travel on the Penzance-Aberdeen express from Oxford to Leicester and back on the Aberdeen-Penzance express from Leicester to Oxford, with no object but to dine on the way and drink and make speeches on the way back ?

There were other dinners : riotous dinners at the George, dinners given by central-European princelings on black tablecloths with seven different kinds of wine, dinners at the Spreadingeagle at Thame, whistling through the night air at 80 m.p.h. in a racing Vauxhall in order to be back by midnight.

Those were days of war, too : war between hearty and æsthete. There was a memorable election night—it must have been way back in '22—when an æsthete, superb in opera cloak and faultless evening dress, was mobbed by the crowd, and in self-defence felled a rugger " hearty " with a loaded stick. The rabble surged around him, out for his blood. He stood there proudly, like an aristocrat of the French Revolution ; and then, quite quietly, faded into the Mitre Hotel, while the mob, foiled of their prey, snarled with impotent rage. That same aristocrat—æsthete, I mean—when some vandals invaded his rooms, drew a sword in self-defence and severed an invader's thumb. Yes ; those were certainly the days.

The change, as far as Oxford is concerned, started

with an American invasion of the university about half-way through the 'twenties. Rich Americans already hard-boiled in the cosmopolitan kettles of Paris, Monte Carlo and New York came up and started to fling money about. The cocktail arrived, and this was a very sinister portent ; for in our day we never drank anything but sherry. Snobbery came too. There was a party at which a large banner was stretched across the room, bearing the legend, " Put your trust in the Lords," followed by the names of the titled guests present. That was very 'thirty-ish.

I dwell on Oxford, because the Oxford of the period was as typical of the Roaring 'Twenties as was the Oxford of the day of the Naughty 'Nineties.

And then London. The first big ball that comes to my mind was at Grosvenor House, for the coming-of-age of Lord Elmley in '24. I have confused memories of drinking ale which was laid down at his birth, and of a ceiling emblazoned with strawberry leaves ; I have a more vivid memory of a steaming casserole containing little round balls which I took to be potatoes. I helped myself liberally, to five or six. They were not potatoes. Each was a whole, stuffed quail. (Each, today, would have been a sausage.)

That must have been the Swan Song of Grosvenor House. The Swan Song of Dorchester House came three years later. Never have I seen so many lovely women in surroundings so suitable to their loveliness as at Dorchester House when Lord Weymouth married Miss Daphne Vivian. There was a grand air of spaciousness, ease and grace ; and the calm beauty of the veiled bride, as she progressed down

the aisle of St. Martin-in-the-Fields on the arm of her father, is an unquenchable memory of the 'twenties. In the 'thirties people are married from village churches instead. The grand London wedding, except for those who seek publicity, is almost a thing of the past.

Then there were other kinds of parties altogether, at the time when some bright young journalist coined the phrase Bright Young People. The Bright Young People must have a chapter to themselves later on. What parties they gave ! Parties for the Blackbirds ; an unforgettable Russian party in Gerald Road, with a negro band, where a whole house and studio had been specially redecorated for a single night ; the swimming party in the St. George's Baths ; David Tennant's Mozart party, where the eighteenth century was recaptured for a night ; Tallulah parties ; Guinness parties ; impromptu wild parties, in fancy undress, in the Royal Hospital Road.

Between parties we went to the Café Anglais, to hear Rex Evans singing about white mice and snowballs and the wrong end of his horse. In the early 'twenties there were Lamb's and the Quadrant, where we drank till late ; later there was the 50-50, and Uncle's ; the old Bat, with its packed, narrow room ; but, above all, there was Chez Victor, where Hutch, in his prime, would sing, and the Prince of Wales would dance night after night, and all the boys would be in the bar and all London's lovely and famous women on the dance floor, and where, until we were raided, we would drink for far longer than Sir William Joynson-Hicks liked. No place in London today compares with Victor's, nor ever

will do. It was to the Roaring 'Twenties what Maxim's in Paris was to a previous epoch.

Paris. We would pop over there for week-ends instead of paying our weekly salary into the bank, as unconcernedly as one might walk from the Berkeley over to the Ritz. There was a memorable *Quatorze Juillet*, with no traffic on the boulevards, but bands at every street corner and the road thick with dancers. That was the week-end when we lost a distinguished M.P. in the rue de Lappe; and there was another, with a noble baronet who clamoured insatiably for *des choses fantastiques*.

There was one week-end in Holland, too, and a Saturday when, after lunch, we suddenly said to each other, "Let's go to Calais," and did. Someone had mentioned an hotel in Calais which had the "best food in Europe." Well, food is often nasty, and in England you expect little else. But even in England you rarely get food which is literally uneatable, as it proved to be in that Calais hotel. But the garlic only added to the spice (*sic*) of that inconsequent week-end.

Inconsequent. Perhaps inconsequence was the essence of the Roaring 'Twenties. There was no particular object in anything that we did, but we were sensible of its full flavour as we did it. Mr. Noel Coward missed out the 'twenties altogether from his *Cavalcade*. Yet he, of all people, should not confound them with the 'thirties. For Mr. Coward, before, in the endeavour to be a "serious artist," he became the former at the expense of the latter, was himself, in *This Year of Grace*, an integral part of the Roaring 'Twenties. We succumbed to *Hay Fever*, too, and *Fallen Angels*. The difference between

their witty inconsequence and the purposeful hysteria of *Cavalcade* is the difference between the Roaring 'Twenties and the Thirsty 'Thirties.

That irresponsible, effortless zest is gone from us all. And indeed, by its very nature it could not last.

I have delivered myself of my rhapsody on the "Roaring 'Twenties," which you can take as you please. But even in the newspapers of the decade you will find the reflection of such a spirit.

People returned from the War with gratuities to spend—and went on spending them for years after they had gone. Americans spent prodigiously. Art pieces reached record levels: £157,000 (reputed) for the Duke of Westminster's "Blue Boy," £175,000 (also reputed) for Lady Desborough's Raphael Madonna and Child, £417,000 for the Holford pictures, £63,336 for the Britwell Library (of which Dr. Rosenbach was responsible for £53,641), and £175,260—£1000 a minute—for the Sargents. Grouse shooting became a wealthy industry. Americans would pay £7000 for three months' shooting in Scotland; one paid £35,000 down for a five years' tenancy of a famous moor; rentals of £25 rose to £1000, and in 1925 it was calculated that £750,000 went North in this way; the Cunard Line leased many of the best moors and spent fortunes improving the lodges, installing electric light, building roads and tennis courts; and Scotland rang with stories of American millionaires who had brought with them 450 pairs of sheets to save laundry bills or who had tendered 1000-dollar notes over the counter in remote Highland villages for £100 worth of tweed. But all

this lavishness vanished as quickly as it came, so that by 1932 gunmakers were facing bankruptcy and Highland lairds a reversion to the simplicity of their former mode of life.

Indeed, the economic factor aside, the rapidity with which ideas and standards changed, throughout the 'twenties, was startling. In the early part of the decade old standards still survived. After the War an order was issued that Guards officers in mufti must wear top-hats on every occasion. Clare Sheridan was almost disowned by her horrified father for dancing with an officer in Trafalgar Square on Armistice Night, and three years later was "cut" at a London party because of her visit to Bolshevik Russia—a circumstance such as not long after would have set every hostess in London clamouring for her company. The old order died very suddenly; one can trace the stages of its demise. It was as if the Duchess of Devonshire woke up one morning to find that, all of a sudden, Chatsworth no longer counted.

The recklessness of spirit died as quickly, though the habit of luxurious life has become too deeply ingrained in Society to be dropped as yet.

"Sonia as she undressed said to Alastair, 'D'you know, deep down in my heart I've got a tiny fear that Basil is going to turn serious on us too.'"

That, from Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief*, sums up the spirit of the 'thirties.

It is possible to trace something of a parallel between the "Roaring 'Forties" of the last century and the "Roaring 'Twenties" of this. Each was an age in which royalty and its pageantry played a part. The marriage of Queen Victoria ushered in the 'forties, and the birth of the Prince of Wales

provided occasion for rejoicing in the following year. Similarly, the 'twenties saw the respective marriages of Princess Mary and the Duke of York ; the public "discovered" with some enthusiasm the young Prince of Wales ; and later in the decade the arrival of Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret Rose aroused all its most luscious sentimental instincts.

Just as the Great Exhibition of 1851 was a product of the 'forties, so did its offspring of 1924, Wembley, typify the peak of the social boom in the 'twenties. London became "the Capital of the Empire." The *Daily Mail* had an article on "The New Miracle" when the King's voice was broadcast, opening the exhibition. Thousands upon thousands of visitors flocked to London from overseas—most of them seeing it for the first time. Three white foreign monarchs and their consorts and one black—the Kings and Queens of Italy, Rumania and Denmark, and Ras Tafari Makonnen, the Crown Prince of Ethiopia—visited their Majesties. There were four Courts and two State Balls. When the King and Queen of Italy arrived,

"People gathered and bands in scarlet and gold marched gloriously to the station, and the Blues with plume and breastplate ranged themselves alongside its entrance, so that in the end old dun Victoria scarce knew itself. Banners flew on the housetops and from the windows ; windows were thrown open and filled with expectant forms.

". . . Then to the stirring, enticing strains of the Italian anthem, which will brighten life in our midst for a few days; the Kings and Queens moved out of the station and took their places in the huge, swaying crimson landaus of State drawn by crimson-caparisoned horses. Fascisti in front of the station cried 'Eia, Eia,

Alala !' and thrust their arms forward in a Roman salute ; Londoners crowding the station approaches, standing on the roofs of taxicabs, volleyed a British cheer ; the scarlet plumes of the Blues tossed as they closed the jingling escort round the carriages."¹

The following night Lord Iveagh gave a dance for the first of the Guinnesses ; and there was a State banquet, at which,

" Wearing a crown in which flashed and sparkled the wonderful Koh-i-noor Diamond and the Stars of Africa—cut from the blue-white purity of the Great Cullinan diamond—the Queen was a majestic figure. . . . As she moved her head the gems blazed with fires which could be seen from the far corners of the spacious crimson and gold banqueting room. . . . There were 150 guests at the dinner and they sat at tables decorated with masses of red roses . . . set in elaborate vessels of gold."

At which time a Labour Government was in power.

The 'forties meant the development of railways, and so of a new freedom ; the development of the motor-car and other mechanical advances did the same for the 'twenties.

The mania of speculation in the 'forties ended in the crash of 1847, when fifteen commercial houses stopped payment and there was a depreciation of £78,000,000 in ten leading railway companies. As Hudson was to the 'forties, so was Hatry to the 'twenties ; for speculation was rife throughout that epoch too.

Both the 'forties and the 'twenties stood for a leavening and consequent change in the manners of Society. Thackeray was the satirist of one ; Frederick Lonsdale of the other.

¹ *Daily Mail*, May 26, 1924.

The real new freedom of each was, in the first instance, an electoral freedom. The Reform Bill of 1832 meant the liberation of the middle class. The extension of the franchise to women in 1918 was a similar liberation. But this was only one feature of the general impulse towards freedom—the chief psychological effect of the War. Men demanded moral, social, intellectual, spiritual liberty in return for four years of slavery. And it is this general emancipation which characterizes the social life of the period. By the time the 'thirties arrived we could put a full stop, start a new paragraph and say: "Well, here we are! Here is the finished article: the fruit of our aspirations and vicissitudes of the last ten years. And just how free are we?"

Of course it is not a finished article. History can never be finished. But the transitions of today are a stage further on from the transitions of the 'twenties. That entitles us to treat the 'twenties as a separate epoch.

And what were those transitions? From an old to a new Society; from an aristocracy based on the snobbery of birth to one based on that of wealth and cosmopolitanism; from an old, and circumscribed, habit of life, to one where greater free will should prevail; from an old and arbitrary, to a new and instinctive morality; from an outworn code of manners to no code of manners; from an old to a new intellectual standard; from a hereditary financial security to one which the individual must create for himself; and, above all, from a personal to an impersonal world.

The social changes had been maturing for some time; the War speeded up their growth and caused



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them to burst into bloom. Throughout the greater part of the 'twenties old and new Society existed side by side, in varying stages of decay and development respectively. The one was having its final fling, and was all the gayer for it ; the other was in its experimental stage, and all the more stimulating for that. Each was tempered with the other. We had our cake and ate it.

The youth of the 'thirties knows only the new, and it is the new which concerns us here. But we must not disclaim responsibility for the new ; for we helped to build it. In criticising the 'thirties, we are automatically criticising the 'twenties as well.

But it need not prevent us from romanticizing them !

CHAPTER III

FORGETTING CLASS DISTINCTIONS

A new social organism—The new poor—The upper classes go into trade—Woman's part—Altered moral values—The Press invents the new Society.

IT was impossible that Society, after the War, should take up again just where it had left off. The whole social organism was transformed.

Not only at the Front, but at home, among the women who did war work, class distinctions had been forgotten for four years. And it was not easy to recall them. The men of the moment were the ex-officers ; and a large proportion of them men of a class which, before the War, had no place in the social world. Till 1914 the Army had been regarded more or less as the preserve of the aristocracy. Was it not the tradition of the aristocrat to go through the world, " sword in hand " ? The Army was a gentleman's profession. It was, in fact, one of the only professions open to gentlemen. It was the aristocracy's duty to fight while the middle class stayed at home and minded its shops. So it had been in previous wars. The gentlemen of the Edwardian Age were very conscious of this distinction. Those who were sensitive to the underlying changes in the social and economic order, who felt that their class was losing its point, was becoming effete through too much peace and plenty, even wanted a war that they

might justify themselves, exert the natural functions of the aristocrat, and prove that their sword was mightier than the middle class cash-box. But when it came it proved far too strong a force for the "fighting class" to cope with alone. Much of the flower of our aristocracy was wiped out in those first few terrible months. Soon the War had demolished every class distinction. The middle class too had taken up its sword and the whole nation was fighting side by side.

The patriotic hysteria of victory allowed no place for social distinctions. No gentleman questioned for a moment the claim of any man with the title of major or captain to be accepted as an equal and to be admitted to that Society which had previously been so exclusive. Moreover, there was a generation missing, and men were at a premium in Society whoever they might be. This very natural "boom" in ex-officers had a peculiar effect upon the personnel of the House of Commons. Before the War no man without an ample independent income and an assured social position would have dreamt of standing for Parliament. The £400 a year income granted to M.P.'s had never been more than a legal formality. But now men saw in it a fixed income and, moreover, an income on which it was possible for a bachelor, with some slight supplement, to live. After all, £400-a-year jobs were not so easy to find, and here was one which carried with it considerable prestige and perquisites into the bargain. Lord Salisbury had prophesied that in time the candidate for power "will seek it for the pay and the journey money, from the good things that come from 'lobbying,' and from that which sticks to the hands of those that

handle contracts." His prophesy has been fulfilled. (It was a logical sequel to the arrival of the New M.P. that a Bill should be passed granting to Members free railway passes between London and their constituencies.)

Of course the constituencies welcomed ex-officers to represent them, regardless of intellectual or political qualifications. A critic of the Edwardian Age,¹ commenting on the fact that the average elector liked a "toff" as his representative, quotes a Radical (*sic*) leaflet recommending a candidate as follows: "He is a good sportsman and a member of the Turf, Bachelors', Marlborough and White's Clubs." Such a testimonial would not cut much ice today—and still less in 1919! The elector of 1918 believed that it was the man not of social but of military eminence who was ordained to power. A leaflet emphasizing the candidate's regiment and war record was the correct gambit—and is still. Thus a vast proportion of the House of Commons to this day is composed of men who were elected simply because they fought in the War, who may be perfectly fitted to command a platoon, but not to govern a country. This undoubtedly contributes to our present discontents.

These ex-officer M.P.'s—not a few of them rankers—were among the first and most effectual instruments in the leavening of post-war Society.

Meanwhile, by a curious irony, the so-called "governing classes" were finding that they could no longer afford to govern. While the new brigade were going into Parliament because of the salary offered, the sons of the old brigade, who, before the

¹ *The Sovereignty of Society*, by Hugh E. M. Stutfield.

War, would have sailed in almost as a matter of course, were now prevented from doing so because of the inadequacy of that salary.

The dispossession of the possessing classes, already at work before the War, was now in full swing. The old upper middle classes, with fixed incomes of £2000 to £5000 a year, were doomed. It was not long before their mansions were being converted into mansion flats. The unearned increment of the upper classes—what with taxation and the decrease by half of its purchasing power—was being drastically reduced, while the producers' share of the national wealth increased.

Mr. E. Phillips Oppenheim¹ calculated as follows his expenses on an (earned) income of £4000 a year :

	Pre-war.	Post-war.
Income-tax .	£440 per year.	£1620 per year.
Chauffeur . .	£1 10s. per week	£3 10s. per week.
Indoor-servant	£1 per week.	£2 per week.
Garden boy .	9s. per week.	15s. per week.

On maidservants' wages there was a 25 per cent increase, while the cost of living was 80 per cent more. On this basis, had he kept up his pre-war style of living, he calculated an annual excess of £2000 of expenditure over income, instead of saving £250.

I quote his case as being typical of many, from which it followed that thousands who had kept up a certain social position before the War could now no longer afford to do so.

The plight of the small *rentier* class, which became the deserving New Poor, was the most pathetic feature of the social revolution. Doctors, clergymen,

¹ *Daily Mail*, October 15, 1919.

schoolmasters, dons, solicitors and other professional men, besides all who were living on savings and pension, went down with dignity before the farmers and shopkeepers. Here is a typical Budget :

Income, £750 a year ; household of five ; two children to educate :

	£
Rent, Rates, Taxes	75
Coal, Gas, Light	24
Servant (general)	30
Laundry	26
Food, etc., 15s. each per week . . .	195
Day-School Education	80
Clothes for three	60
Income-tax	97
Insurance	50
	<hr/>
	£637
	<hr/>

This left £113 a year for travelling, doctor, dentist, chemist, holiday, amusements, season ticket, lunches, tobacco, subscriptions, gifts, charity, papers, books, upkeep of home, repairs, stamps and stationery.

Many letters to the newspapers at that time show real human tragedy. A university tutor of eighty wrote to the *Daily Mail* :

“ It does seem hard that the last few years of life should be full of suffering through poverty. Our food is very poor and not too plentiful. Our clothing is old and ought to have been replaced long ago. Rates and taxes are going up enormously. Please help us who are in such great difficulties.”

And he had saved enough to bring him in an income of £350 a year.

The wife of a retired naval officer wrote :

"Before the War my husband had a secretarial appointment and we were passing rich on £300 or £400 a year. I made a little pin money by writing, kept a nurse at £18 for my baby girl, and a good maid for the housework at a similar wage. We even indulged in a motor-cycle and side-car."

His post-war appointment, she adds, brings in an annual income of £450 " (worth less than £225 on a pre-war basis) and there are four of us to keep. For nearly four years I have been nurse, cook, house-keeper and 'char' in my little cottage, and sometimes the breaking-point seems near."

"My soul is a starved, shrivelled thing. All my thoughts are for the actual bodily needs of my family," wrote a woman whose husband was secretary to a Member of Parliament.

Such was the plight of the professional classes and of many who were offshoots of the old aristocracy. So it was, proportionately, throughout every stratum of society. (Conditions for many are worse today, and the Society of today is proportionately revolutionized.) If the local butchers and bakers were thus superseding the minor gentry, so, up above, were the brewers and brokers superseding the major gentry. It was computed that there were some 340,000 wealthy war profiteers in England in 1919, and it stands to reason that a proportion of them made their way into an impoverished Society, just as the commercial classes had begun to do on a smaller scale before the War. Slowly they got the field more and more to themselves. For the older aristocracy was inclined to sell its London mansions, retire to the country and live on such of its estates and with such of its dignity as it could still preserve,

thus ceasing to be *London* Society at all. Many of its minor lights went to live abroad. Dinard, Mentone, Bordighera and such places house them in profusion still—or did until Britain went off gold.

There was just as much levelling down as levelling up. The upper classes now began, almost as a matter of course, to go into business. Only thus could they save the fortunes of their class. This invasion of the City was regarded with a certain amount of scepticism by the men in possession. "We want him for clerking, not breeding purposes," was the reply of one blunt commercialist to a young applicant giving aristocratic references.¹ But it soon became apparent that the aristocracy had other qualities beyond mere "connections," and they were absorbed into the business world without question. Even members of the Royal Family, like Lord Cambridge and Lord Carisbrooke, entered it without arousing much comment. Guinea-pigs there were, it is true ; but guinea-pigs were ancient history.

Other trades and professions absorbed them too : advertising, journalism, the motor business. Some invented occupations of their own. Mr. Cedric Alexander started a "Social Bureau," mainly for the purpose of shepherding Americans and other socially ambitious people around Mayfair. The post of social secretary, equally, became a remunerative one. The restaurant and night-club business attracted many ex-officers. Lord Bective earned a lot of publicity and the title of the "Electric Earl" by founding an electrical company. Sir Joseph Tichborne became a bookmaker.

¹ *The World of Fashion*, by Ralph Nevill.

"Young men," wrote the social chronicler of the epoch in 1929, ". . . have remained aristocrats by instinct and become democrats by intention. One young peer I know manufactures margarine. Another, bearer of a famous name, sells pills. A third sells underclothes in a large store. Only recently I wrote of Mr. Anthony Vivian, the beautiful Lady Weymouth's brother, who is assistant manager of a theatre. And yesterday Mr. Ulick Verney, who is a son of Sir Harry and Lady Joan Verney, told me that he sold loose-leaf ledgers."

Mr. Gordon Selfridge, Junior, a scholar of Winchester College, started his career as a shopwalker in his father's store, and other public-school boys followed suit. Today Etonians start in the kitchens of hotels with the prospect of becoming reception clerks and rising, subsequently, to management. I should doubt if there were a single trade or profession today which an "aristocrat" would scorn. There are public-school policemen in the streets, and it is the present policy of Lord Trenchard to draw as many more of them into the Force as possible.

But it is to women that the real levelling process was due; for after all, men had always associated with others outside their station, but had kept their business and their social life apart. It fell to women to exploit the combination of the two for profit. Through them the process worked reciprocally, and if Society was going into trade, trade was coming into Society.

Besides, think of the business that could be done over the luncheon table! Mayfair women working on commission for the firms of their friends would nose out likely Americans and socially ambitious

suburbans, bait the hook with an invitation to luncheon, and lure them on to large purchases. Formerly Society was held to be a force in politics ; now it is a force only in the retail trade. The two are inextricably intertwined. You can hardly go to a party but what somebody tries to sell you something or to decorate you a house. It no longer surprises us to read that " Colonel the Hon. Fred Cripps and his wife arranged a cocktail party at their hairdressing establishment in Bond Street the other evening." Moreover the most enterprising among the ordinary traders, instead of complaining of the blacklegs of Mayfair, now recognize that Mayfair is a business asset. They engage social celebrities to superintend their various departments and pay commission to others for the introduction of custom. In fact things have come to such a pass that, after paying commission to each of his agents who claim to have made the " catch," the trader is often puzzled to find his profit !

Another important leavening factor was the Stage. King Edward first opened the social door to actors and actresses, so that post-war Society has simply continued an existing process. A new development was the adoption of stage and film careers by Society people. Nobody was horrified when Lady Diana Cooper starred in *The Great Adventure* in 1922, nor even when the Ruthven Twins became the Ralli Twins and appeared on the " halls." Lady Oxford said that her son, Anthony Asquith, should only go into the film business over her dead body. She did not, however, repair to a gas oven when he did so. She became a film fan.

The mannequins of the middle 'twenties followed

stage and film stars through King Edward's ever open door. "The Mannequin: Her Rise as a Social Factor," said the newspapers; and the process, as usual, has been reciprocal. While many a Society beauty today started life as a mannequin, so did many a mannequin start life as a Society beauty.

And from mannequins and chorus girls it is but a short step to the demi-monde. . . .

For beside the fall of social came the fall of moral prejudices. The War had altered the public conception of morality beyond recognition. Even the older generation, confronted by the ravages of hasty war marriages, had to modify their attitude to divorce and divorced persons. Lady Violet Greville, in her memoirs of Victorian and Edwardian times, describes a former Lady Stamford, who

"had been a member of the demi-monde for a short time when Lord Stamford, a shy man in ordinary society, fell in love with her and married her. They were never separated for a single day until his death thirty years later, and her conduct was irreproachable.

"She went everywhere with him (except into Society), welcomed his men friends, did the honours of the house, sat at the top of the table and proved the most admirable wife. Yet no lady at Newmarket or other race-meetings ever spoke to her. She sat in lonely grandeur in her carriage or rode beside her husband. I was young and inexperienced in the ways of the world then, but I longed to speak to her and show some human interest in the quiet, dignified woman who always behaved with perfect propriety under such trying circumstances."

Such a situation would be unimaginable in post-war times.

It will be argued that exclusiveness is Society's

only *raison d'être*. Why then, when it ceased to be exclusive, did it not also cease to exist ?

The answer is that it did. Society today is a fiction. But it is a very important fiction. "Society" and "Aristocracy" used to be interchangeable terms. They are no longer so. The aristocracy, or such of it as remains whole, leads a life which is modest, unspectacular and, in short, not a Society life. But snobbery, in the make-up of the Englishman, plays an integral part. He must have an objective for his snobbery ; so if there is no Society he will invent one. That is what has happened ; only the Press has invented it for him.

The post-war decade has witnessed the immense development of newspapers. A newspaper used simply to be an organ for the purveyance of news, and was hence confined to some half-dozen pages. Today it has swelled to four times the size and its news is no longer its only stock-in-trade. A newspaper is a mixed bag of tricks, providing sufficient material to occupy the whole of the average man's daily leisure. It performs the advisory functions of the dressmaker, doctor, psychoanalyst, humorist, clergyman, governess, moralist, historian, salesman, beggar, philanthropist, critic, cook, gardener, chauffeur, tipster, solicitor, stockbroker, mother, father, guide, philosopher and friend. It provides a schoolroom nursery for the children and a gambling saloon for the grown-ups. It even provides for your family when you are dead. The modern daily newspaper is a kind of Universal Uncle, whose ministrations have made an incalculable difference to the daily life of the individual.

In no direction has this development been more

marked than in the view of Society which it presents to his eyes.

It is continually objected that the columns of the gossip writer do not reflect modern society but only a small and insignificant part thereof. Small, possibly. But how can it be insignificant? The very fact that its news is so prominently transmitted to so many millions of readers renders it significant. Society today virtually has its being only within the limits of the public imagination; but within those limits it holds as much sway as ever it did. What the Press describes as Society is going to influence the public as much as did its conception of Society before the War. Therefore, what the Press describes as Society *is* Society.

Nor does it portray erroneously the life of that egregious body. If anything it errs on the side of understatement.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL AND PERSONAL

The gossip column before the War—Lords Castlerosse and Donegall
—If you can't be good, be careful!—Seekers after publicity—
The "sneak-guest" controversy—The Dragoman.

A SALIENT feature of the post-war epoch has been the increased appetite of the public for every form of gossip. In one of its forms it happens to be known as "serious reading." People devour innumerable volumes of memoirs and chatty biographies and flatter themselves that they are improving their minds by the study of history. But the same people will express strong disapproval of those who devour with equal eagerness the other modern form of gossip literature—the morning newspapers with their social columns—stigmatising the latter as rubbish and a waste of time to read. They will say, "Why can't you read something *serious* for a change?"

It must be admitted that when the memoirs of Colonel Repington and of Lady Oxford appeared they raised an outcry comparable to that which the gossip columns excite today. But that outcry has completely died down, and the books now stand on the respected shelves. The gossip columns, however, still tend to induce an apoplectic rage in the owners of those shelves.

Yet in essence there is precious little difference

between the two forms of literature, save that the one purveys the events and anecdotes and scandals of some years ago while the other purveys the events and anecdotes and scandals of yesterday. Greville was a journalist of the old school. Lord Castlerosse is a journalist of the new school. I am aware that death, in this country, is held to confer respectability. But the fact that Greville is dead and wrote about people who are dead does not make him a whit more "respectable" than Lord Castlerosse, who is alive and writes about people who are alive.

Society journalism is as old as the hills. Thackeray inveighed against the *Court Circular* of his time.

"It chokes me!" he wrote.

"When Miss Snobky was so very young as to be in the nursery regions, and to walk of early mornings in St. James's Park, protected by a French governess and followed by a huge hirsute flunkey in the canary-coloured livery of the Snobkys, she used occasionally in these promenades to meet with young Lord Claude Lollipop, the Marquis of Sillabub's younger son. In the very height of the season, from some unexplained cause, the Snobkys suddenly determined upon leaving town. Miss Snobky spoke to her female friend and confidante. 'What will poor Claude Lollipop say when he hears of my absence?' asked the tender-hearted child.

"'Oh, perhaps he won't hear of it,' answers the confidant.

"'My dear, he will read it in the papers,' replied the dear little fashionable rogue of seven years old. She knew already her importance, and how all the world of England, how all the would-be-genteel people, how all the silver-fork worshippers, how all the tattle-mongers, how all the grocers' ladies, the tailors' ladies, the attorneys' and merchants' ladies, and the people living at Clapham and Brunswick Square—who have

no more chance of consorting with a Snobky than my beloved reader has of dining with the Emperor of China—yet watched the movements of the Snobkys with interest, and were glad to know when they came to London and left it.”

In the 'sixties there appeared a particularly scurrilous production called *The Queen's Messenger*, whose editor was Grenville Murray. But it was short-lived, because Lord Carrington, objecting to something that was written about himself, assaulted Murray in the street. His Lordship was duly prosecuted and the case adjourned, but when the case came up for hearing again Murray had fled the country. He died in shame in Paris many years later.

I hardly think that Lords Donegall and Castle-rosse will ever be similarly disgraced !

Out of curiosity I looked up the files of *The Onlooker*, a prominent Society weekly, for the date when I was born (June 25, 1904). Amid a series of advertisements offering whisky at 46/—, champagne at 50/— and claret from 15/— a dozen, ball suppers from Gunter's, furnishing on easy terms (no deposit required) from the Midland Furnishing Co., luncheon for 5/— at the Savoy and dinner for 7/6 ; blouses from 28/— and marvellous gowns from 2½ guineas ; amid announcements of a conjuror who still had “ a few dates for garden parties, at homes and bazaars,” of a bridge fête, of a charity dance at Stafford House, and of *tableaux vivants* featuring, amongst others, Lady Marjorie Manners and Miss Elizabeth Asquith ; amid all these specimen reflections of the life of the times, I found the following :

“What we hear :

—“That Almack’s Club is already too small, though the subscription is eight guineas.

—“That the lady’s indiscretion of last year was forgiven, and her name reappeared in the list.

—“That the Duke’s mother has petitioned for a divorce.

—“That Miss Rockefeller has started on an automobile trip through Scotland.

—“That the Ascot party did not come off, after all.

—“That the enclosure tickets must have been ‘lost in the post.’

—“That Mr. Astor is giving a concert on the night of the State Ball at Buckingham Palace.

—“That it is generally assumed that the famous secret of Glamis Castle has evaporated.

—“That they both refused alliances with Princes of the English Royal Family.

—“That Princess Hatzfeldt did not go to Ascot this year, but spent the week at Draycott, trying her new 60 h.p. Mercedes.”

From which we are to conclude, not only that the Edwardian columnists were writing about just the same topics as their successors are today—clubs and Americans and divorce and contretemps about the Royal Enclosure—but that they were doing so in just the same suggestive style as some of our modern features.

From the pages of *The Onlooker* of 1904 I pick out, at random, a few more specimens :

“The Duchess of Roxburghe, who was of the Frogmore party, was in pale blue silk, just a little too smart and French, but her high-crowned hat suited her well.”

“People still talk of the rumoured Royal engagement, and some have gone so far as to say that the King would not disapprove if the young couple could make up £4000 a year between them.”

“ What we hear :

—“ That a grateful client has left Mrs. Charles Ansell a legacy of £250,000.

—“ That no less than five ‘ little strangers ’ of importance are expected between March and May.

—“ People say that Lord Seaton’s brother and heir is engaged to be married.

—“ That Miss Pfizer, an American girl, is engaged to be married to a young English baron.”

The paragraph about the rumoured royal engagement would have been considered in far too bad taste to be printed today ; the other rumoured engagements show that the modern newspaper is not alone in anticipating such events. Hardly a week passed without some engagement being foreshadowed, in very explicit terms, in *The Onlooker*. It was a common habit among newspapers of the time. Miss Margot Tennant’s engagement, for instance, was publicly announced both to Lord Rosebery and to Arthur Balfour, and she records that the announcement was the cause of estrangement with the former.

The paragraph writer, though not actually, as at the present time, a member of Society, was a feature of social life before the War, and people even had their own, much as one might employ a secretary or a laundress. She was usually a woman with journalistic connections, who would describe her mistress’s dresses and entertainments, announce her movements, express in print “ general regret ” when she was ill and “ general satisfaction ” when she recovered, get her photograph published and those of her children, and, when opportunity occurred, slip in paragraphs that would annoy her rivals. In return

she would be rewarded with cheques and clothes, would be supplied with other gossip for her paper and introduced to other ladies in Society. Most of the women who made use of the paragraph writers were rich, ambitious suburbans, but some were of the poorer aristocracy who held that a certain amount of publicity reassured their creditors. I think one may assume that there were others who appreciated publicity for publicity's sake.

After the War newspapers began to import Society people to write their social news, and gossip columns became more alive and better informed—a circumstance which aroused, and still arouses, considerable indignation.

But even this was not an innovation. The first columnist of this kind was "Marmaduke" who wrote the Letters of a Linkman in *Truth* before the War. "Marmaduke" was a well-known clubman, Mr. C. E. Jerningham, who came of an old family. He was a cultured and witty personality. Ralph Nevill¹ recalls how a cousin of his, at luncheon, was

"only prevented from throwing Mr. Jerningham out of the window by the combined efforts of the other guests. This was owing to the latter's chaff, which my cousin, a wild, fighting subaltern of the old-fashioned sort, had taken much amiss. However they were good friends afterwards."

Jerningham hardly ever went out at nights. He did not move in the fashionable world. Unlike the modern social columnist he used to dine early and go to bed at nine! But then he was not a social columnist in the true sense of the word, since he wrote of general tendencies rather than of individual

¹ *The World of Fashion.*

figures. He was, in fact, the lineal father of Lord Castlerosse, who does not write social gossip either, but rather a personal commentary on life in general.

Jerningham was shrewd and witty, and very much aware of the social changes of his time. He was deliciously ironical, as when he invented an East End Ladies' Association, "to clothe the half-naked women who attend social entertainments and theatres, to enlighten the fashionable as to the insanitary conditions of the life they live, and to establish a crèche in Belgravia where young married women in Society could leave their children instead of entrusting them to careless servants while they lunched, dined, or danced."

Sometimes he was prophetic :¹

"The clubs of the future will not be enclosed taverns or coffee-houses, but enclosed restaurants. They will be very large, will be furnished with the utmost luxury, and both men and women will be eligible for election, for cleverness, interesting conversation, and wit are not important elements in the life of our times. There are evidences of this change already. At most of the fashionable restaurants in London there are groups of well-known men and women who have their luncheons and dinners there almost regularly ; at some of them a 'supper' club has been established, and at one of them a portion of the building has been reserved for a small body that has resolved itself into a club."

"Marmaduke's" column was always animated with good sense, and in many ways he was ahead of his time.

"If man renders a signal service to the community," he wrote, "it is customary to reward him with a title. Why should woman be treated differently ?"

¹ *Truth*, July 28, 1904.

And again :

“ The ‘ once a Peer always a Peer ’ principle is contrary not only to commonsense but to the best interests of the community. The Peer in existing conditions is one of the chief centres of example, and if he radiates a pernicious influence he should unquestionably be deprived of the title for the public good.”

The dowager of 1904 and her satellites, of whom he writes (inspired, surely, by the notorious Lady Cardigan), have many a counterpart in the social columns of today :

“ The Decay of the Dowager, Dear Lady Betty, is a feature of the moment which is causing grave anxiety to those English men and women who look forwards. . . . Painted and perfumed, over-dressed in the day and under-dressed in the evening, this skittish sexagenarian is generally attended by a following of obscure youths who hope through her assistance to become associated with ‘ Society ’. . . . At the restaurant, at the theatres, at dinners and dances, in the Park and on the river the dowager now abounds, attended by her following of designing youths who wear in her presence the continuous smile which is the badge of obsequious obscurity, and fill the air with their semi-effeminate laughter and their falsetto exclamations of affected delight.”

The Letters of a Linkman would made interesting reading if now republished in book form ; their sentiment is not out-of-date. Moreover the modern social columnist could with advantage turn to them as a model.

But, apart from “ Marmaduke’s,” all such columns before the War, numerous as they were, were compiled at second-hand. The post-war newspaper proprietor must have people who knew what they

were writing about. After all, the Lobby correspondent moved in political lobbies, the sporting correspondent in the sporting world, and so forth. Therefore it was only reasonable to have a social correspondent who moved in the social world. The newspaper-reading public were out for snobstuff, so let it be authoritative snobstuff ! In time, every daily paper was running a gossip page as one of its principal features : and the public, which in the past had stood on chairs to see Lily Langtry in the Park and had blocked Bond Street as it gazed at the Society beauties in the photographers' windows, could henceforward gratify all its curiosity about all the Lily Langtrys without stirring from its breakfast table.

Hannen Swaffer, Charles Graves, Alan Parsons and Percy Sewell were the first social columnists to know the world they wrote of, but it was not until 1926 that the *Sunday Express* produced the first signed social column, Lord Castlerosse's " Londoner's Log." The following year the *Weekly Dispatch* lodged a counterblast in the shape of Lady Eleanor Smith, while Lord Donegall started to write for the now defunct *Sunday News*. While their Lordships of Donegall and Castlerosse proved themselves adept columnists, each in his different style, Lady Eleanor, who has since become a Romantic novelist of exceptional talent, never admired the view from her " Window in Vanity Fair " and soon retired behind its curtains.

The columnist's art is a trick of style and observation, which comes to some quite naturally and which others acquire. But, beyond demanding a certain alertness of mind, it is largely accidental. Possibly

the world's worst gossip-writer was the late Lord Birkenhead, who used very occasionally to contribute paragraphs to his daughter's page at the time when I was helping to edit it ! I remember that he wrote some paragraphs on the death of Lord Haig. What we required was a few light strokes, with perhaps an anecdote, to illustrate the impression which Lord Haig made when you met him, a slight, personal pen-portrait enabling the reader to picture him in his mind. Lord Birkenhead wrote a sonorous piece of prose which, as an example of funeral oratory, was superb. But it could have no place in a gossip column. It does not follow that mastery of a major art carries mastery of a minor in its stride.

Lords Castlerosse and Donegall have mastered the minor one. Each leads a different life and displays a distinct personality. Lord Castlerosse is the bluff clubman-philosopher, full of wit and good sense, intolerant of humbug and shams, realizing the good things of life, preoccupied, like Samuel Butler, with money, hence interested in those who make it, and living his life among men of personality and brains who are usually older than himself and of whom his chief demand is that they remain themselves. Lord Donegall is the modern young man-about-town, moving among his own generation, frankly enjoying their life, their restaurants, their parties, their night-clubs, their cocktails, their dance bands, and even their Antibes holidays, and portraying it all with lightness of touch.

Some are born columnists, others achieve columns, but all have calumny thrust upon them. Having myself edited a social column for three years I have some experience of this calumny.

Three contretemps which I recall have made me enemies for life. (Doubtless there were others, but they do not at the moment come to mind.) One concerned the remark of an ex-actress who avowed to me in the strongest language her determination never to return to the stage. She was very angry at my quotation of this. It would, she said, prevent her ever obtaining another job on the stage. She returned to the stage in a star part some months later.

Another of my enemies was a lawyer, Lord Halsbury. Lord Halsbury, to whose presence, one morning, I was peremptorily summoned, accused me of writing that his daughter had been seen at a private dance unchaperoned. I had written nothing of the kind. Lord Halsbury, however, being a clever lawyer, so construed the paragraph in his speech for the prosecution that my innocent words were twisted into a libellous statement of the grossest character. His Parthian shot, fired with all the withering sarcasm of a cross-examining counsel, was : " Have you ever *been* to a private dance ? " Suitable repartee, on such occasions, always dawns on one some hours later ; hence I did not reply, as I might have done, that I had attended Lord Halsbury's own dance for the *début* of his daughter some weeks earlier. So dire sentence was passed upon me, to the effect that I must never mention Lord Halsbury or any member of his family in my column again. (I should hate to be cross-examined by Lord Halsbury in court.)

The third battle was a sequel to a silly season speech of Lord Derby's in which his Lordship confessed that for fifty years he had been unable to

touch his toes. The Press took up the cry, and put to other celebrities the burning question whether or no they could touch their toes. Mr. Cochran said that he did it every morning ; Mr. Nevinson that he had never seen them ; Mr. Shaw said, " Is that what you've rung me up to ask ? Well, God forgive you ! " and so forth. At a supper party in a club, one night, the wife of a prominent politician proved to her assembled fellow-guests that she was able to touch her toes. This fact I recorded in my column the following day, as an appendage to the symposium of Mr. Cochran, Mr. Nevinson and Mr. Shaw. The lady was furious. She contended that the paragraph held her up to public ridicule. It might, so a friend confided in me, prevent her husband from being created a peer. She has never spoken to me since. Her husband was recently elevated to the peerage.

Now the moral of this story is, " Don't touch your toes in a public restaurant ! " When Lord Londonderry said that the writings of Lord Castlerosse made for Socialism, Lord Castlerosse replied : " Who is responsible for that ? Surely those who commit the deeds ; not those who chronicle them." Before the War people had greater freedom within Society's ranks, because the social columnists were all outside them. Thus were they able to keep up a reputable face to the world. Their ignominious money intrigues and their scandals never saw the light of day. But things are very different now. Society people are making money, not merely by selling things to each other over the luncheon table, but by recording each other's doings in the Press. You cannot blame them. They have to earn their living, and this is as good a

way as any other. The social column must be accepted as a fact, as a sign of the times. You may regret it if you like, but no good will come of that. The remedy is to adapt your conduct accordingly. Today, if you wish to keep up your pre-war reputation, you have to be twice as careful as you were then. You dare not behave like a fishwife in somebody's drawing-room. There may be a social columnist present, who will record your antics. Before the War you could do these things ; but it is different now. People who lead public lives are fair game for the social columns. Unless they are secretive about their private affairs they must pay the penalty of publicity.

But, of course, there are two sides to the picture, for, after all, it is fun to appear in social columns. To become a columnist is the safest cure for snobbery! Publicity-seekers are the first to condemn them. A *débutante* said to me once, " Did you see, the *Times* had two whole columns of names of the guests at the Londonderry House reception ? I suppose there *are* people who read all that stuff." As an afterthought she added, " By the way, I didn't notice your name there ! " As a rule you will find that those who genuinely dislike publicity keep a dignified silence, preferring to disregard the social columns as beneath their consideration. As to the others, if they like it, they must be prepared to take it both ways. Hostesses who invite the Press to their parties for the purposes of advertisement must today consider themselves in the same position as dramatists who invite the Press to their first nights. A party, under these conditions, is no longer a dispensation of hospitality, with its consequent obliga-

tions. It is a sort of public spectacle. Therefore it is only fair that the critics—that is to say, the social columnists—should have a free hand in reporting it. The hostess cannot reasonably object when they give it a bad notice, any more than the dramatist can reasonably object to the critic who condemns his play, or the politician to the Parliamentary Correspondent who criticizes his speech. You cannot have your cake and eat it.

Of course, the reaction of the average person to the social column is less definite. The average person quite enjoys appearing in print, but at the same time prefers, on occasion, that his or her doings should not be chronicled. Here the remedy is easier still. The safest way to prevent a story appearing in a newspaper is to ring up the editor, tell him the story, and ask him not to print it.

The popular attitude to the social columnist is akin to that of a *débutante* confronted by a real live gangster. A sensation of mingled awe and admiration titillates her senses. She is afraid of the forbidden fruit, yet longs to pluck it. She would enjoy the sensation of being "taken for a ride" by this villainous and glamorous man; yet she would hate that operation to be carried to its logical conclusions. It would be a thrill to be bumped off; yet not *right* off. "Oh!" she will say, "are you really a gossip writer? How thrilling! But you are a very dangerous man. I mustn't come near you! Do tell me. What is it *like* to be a gossip writer? It must be great fun saying just what you like about people. You must be very clever. Now don't you dare say anything about me!" While some—increasingly few—would refuse to meet a

character so lawless as a gangster, others would flee from him needlessly, forgetting that those outside his racket are not of the smallest interest to him. So it is with people who say to the social columnist, "I daren't open my mouth, because I'm sure you'll put all my conversation in your paper," and do not stop to consider that they have no conversation. But all disregard the possibility that gangsters may be human. Journalists have better natures, like the rest of mankind. The importation of "gentlemen" into their ranks has in no way lowered their morality. If you treat a journalist like mud he is liable to reciprocate the treatment. If you treat him like a gentleman you will often find that he is one. That is to say, if you ask a social columnist, politely, to keep his mouth shut it is quite on the cards that he will do so.

Four years ago the *Times* sponsored an agitation against the social columnist. A lady (or gentleman) signing himself (or herself) "A London Hostess," complained in a letter of "a new and dangerous tendency in our social life," naming the arrival of what she (or he) called the "sneak guest." "What was at one time mere idle and comparatively harmless chatter (written in many cases with no personal knowledge of the people concerned)," the letter continued, "has lately developed in certain quarters into a regular system of spying, followed by the publication of the most deplorable hints and insinuations."

The reason given for airing this grievance in the *Times* was that that newspaper "stands entirely apart from this class of journalism." "A London Hostess" seemed unaware that the *Times* is the

only type of newspaper in this country where people actually pay cash for social advertisement.

There followed a correspondence, in the course of which the only apt remark was that of a gentleman named Mr. E. G. Tremlett.

“Hitherto,” wrote Mr. Tremlett, “it has been the general impression that the paragraphs of shooting, dancing and week-end parties which adorn our periodicals in such profusion were published with the consent of the objects depicted, but now at last, owing to the hospitality of your columns, the world knows that these insertions appear only in the teeth of vigorous opposition of the people concerned.”

One correspondent informed readers of the *Times* that these “sneak guests” were often rewarded with fitted dressing-cases and fur coats for their services. This lady must have been referring to the disreputable old days of before the War. During the whole course of my career as a social columnist I was never once offered a fitted dressing-case. I used, it is true, to be hospitably entertained by restaurants and at charity teas by ladies who, I knew, had been reviling me before the call of charity transformed them and would continue to do so after their wretched entertainments were over. But even they never so much as mentioned a fur coat in my presence. The only occasion on which I was offered a tangible reward for “writing-up” a woman it was to give publicity, not to her, but to her dress-shop.

None of the *Times* correspondents seemed to be aware that social columnists today are professional journalists who, so far from deserving the name of “sneak guests,” make no attempt to hide their vocation. The amateur contributor is practically

extinct. Indeed, he would be unable, in modern society, to continue his activities for long without being found out. Social columns are, virtually, no longer anonymous, and the "London Hostess" must have been singularly lacking in social perspicacity if she failed to recognize each of her (or his) guests for what he was. To talk of "a regular system of spying" savoured of persecution mania, a condition well known to psycho-analysts, even among the hostesses of Mayfair.

Lord Castlerosse had the last word, when he suggested three "obvious reasons" for the London Hostess's anonymity :

"That the correspondent was not a London hostess at all but in private life a Labour Member of Parliament ; that the 'London Hostess' had a guilty conscience ; that the writer of the letter had no courage. One of the extraordinary delusions which still prevail in the West End," he added, "is that the inhabitants object to having their names and pictures in the newspapers. This is on a par with such statements as 'bullies are always cowards' or 'great men are always modest.'"

And so the "London Hostess" retired into oblivion—perhaps into a nursing home, to be cured of her spy delusions.

Since when people have come to accept the social column as an inevitable feature of modern life ; an evil, perhaps, but one that it is useless to combat. Since when, too, the standard of the social column has visibly improved.

Columnists, in London, labour under various difficulties, not the least of which is their very merit : lack of anonymity. In America the columnist is respected as such, and signs his name to everything he

writes. But as long as the fiction prevails in this country of pretending to disapprove of his trade, as long as people avoid him because they think they ought to avoid him, he will be handicapped in his choice of material. This spirit, however, is rapidly disappearing, and he is chased far more than he is shunned.

Another difficulty is our law of libel. In America columnists can say whatever they like about people with impunity. Walter Winchell does. In England they have to be more careful, and, unless a social column is frank, it is apt to be insipid, where none but the most effusive adjectives are applied to the looks and dispositions of its characters.

One columnist at least—The Dragoman of the *Daily Express*—has overcome these difficulties, and produces every day a critical commentary which is incisive and humorous, with the added merit of embracing every phase of life. So many social columns suffer from the attempt to confine themselves to the "social." The Dragoman looks at everything: Society, sport, the Army, politics, the stage, literature, art. With regard to the latter he can always be relied upon to take a cultured view, often in opposition to the other columns of his paper. For instance, with regard to the favourite English pastime of Epstein-baiting he remarked: "The persistent campaign against this work [Rima] and its sculptor is a laudable perpetuation of the tradition by which nine out of every ten genuinely creative artists have been chivvied and persecuted by the rest of mankind."

Shams and snobs are demolished in his column, which is pervaded with an irony so light as often to appear unconscious. In his deliciously Gilbertian

view of the peerage this irony is in fact sometimes unconscious, as in the two paragraphs that follow :

" My reference on this page to the skill of Lord Knutsford in designing his own shirts has brought me a number of letters, in one of which a correspondent reminds me that the late Lord Pirbright, whose title is now extinct, also possessed this curious distinction.

" Lord Ancaster, he adds, is said to be the best knitter in the peerage and makes his own socks, while Lord Listowel and Lord Gainford are experts with the needle.

" Lord Ennismore, Lord Listowel's eldest son, who comes of age in September, is a skilled embroiderer."

And the second :

" The marquis may well be described as the most versatile peer, for he has in turn been soldier, actor, author, journalist, caricaturist, sheep farmer, dog-breeder, poultry farmer, wine merchant, playwright and skirt dancer."

But there is surely a touch of conscious irony in the heading, " Puffing Peer " :

" . . . one eminent peer, a former Viceroy of Ireland, is called upon again and again to give his realistic imitation of a train.

" To perform this feat he vanishes behind a screen, and a succession of puffings, screechings, and whistlings are heard, indicating the start, journey, and slowing down of the train "

On the subject of certain ambitious American hostesses we are laughing with, not at, The Dragoman every time. Here, in chronological order, we have the various activities of Mrs. James Corrigan :

July 20, 1929 :

" It was, I am told, rather too hot at Ascot yesterday. . . . ' My ! ' exclaimed Mrs. Corrigan, ' I should like it hotter still. ' "

November 6, 1931 :

GOOD NEWS

"Mrs. Corrigan is coming to London to attend the Opening of Parliament."

November 25, 1931 :

"I was amused yesterday to hear the latest story about the indefatigable Mrs. Corrigan. Someone came up to her the other day, it seems, and said : ' Do you know the Dardanelles ? ' "

" ' Wal no,' replied Mrs. Corrigan, with ready wit, ' but I've got lots of letters of introduction to them. I guess they're *terribly* nice people.' "

March 30, 1932 :

"Mrs. Corrigan has now gone to Rome, but she will be back in London, you will be relieved to hear, in May.

"There is at least one link between her and Lady Mendl—another remarkably vital and intelligent woman.

"Both frequently stand on their heads—for the sake of health and for the entertainment of their friends.

"In addition Mrs. Corrigan is a Christian Scientist."

May 20, 1932 :

"Mrs. Corrigan . . . honoured Mussolini with her friendship, and an enormous photograph of him stands in her boudoir in the place of honour once occupied by photographs of the Spanish Royal Family—now, of course, no longer what they were."

I am reminded of an occasion when I had the honour of meeting Mrs. Corrigan at luncheon. The hostess had placed her next to Mr. George Moore, who was in *enfant terrible* mood and in the middle of luncheon was heard to remark to his neighbour : "I always think, Mrs. Corrigan, that of all sexual perversions chastity is the most incomprehensible." Mrs. Corrigan was torn in three. Firstly she seemed

but dimly aware of what Mr. Moore meant ; secondly, her American conscience told her that it was something not quite nice ; but thirdly, here she was seated next to the great man, and must play up accordingly. Mrs. Corrigan was quite equal to the situation. "Wal," she said, diplomatically, "I guess I shall have to think over that, Mr. Moore."

After the crash of the pound The Dragoman recorded :

"PATRIOTISM

" 'As an example,' she says, 'to the girlhood of Britain,' the lovely Miss Margaret Whigham has decided in the interests of economy, to have her hair re-set only once a fortnight in future. and to stop wearing stockings in the evening.

" On the other hand, to stimulate trade, she has just bought four new evening dresses."

And the following also appeals to me :

" Mr. Noel Coward attended a public dinner the other evening. In the course of the proceedings the band played ' God save the King.'

" 'Why,' said Mr. Coward, 'that's a tune from Cavalcade.' "

Two more vignettes by The Dragoman display the comedy inherent in the modern social scene :

" The club was crowded. Lovely women, all uniformly maquillées and expensively tailor-made, sat toying with their steak and kidney puddings or their slimming salads.

" Suddenly a vast drop of water fell on Miss Margaret Bannerman's head.

" In quick succession three drops fell on Miss Ethel Levey, and four on the Comtesse de Sibour.

" Everyone looked up. A large pool of water was forming on the ceiling. A deluge was imminent.

" Miss Anita Elson dashed for the door.

" 'My new hat !' she wailed.

" Others, more courageous, dashed upstairs—to find the kitchen flooded ; a tap had been left running and the sink had overflowed.

" Lady Carisbrooke and Mrs. Cecil Pim directed the salvage operations with terrific sang-froid.

" You will observe that I have mentioned women only.

" This is because most of the men, true to type, were securely ensconced well out of the danger area—at the bar."

The second describes one of those snob concerts which are given in snob houses :

" Dr. Sargent, too, was in fine form ; but, for the benefit of those sitting too far away to see his conducting of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, Lady Mount Temple beat time vigorously with her green ostrich feather fan—so vigorously, indeed, that the fan began to moults over Mrs. Robin D'Erlanger.

" Half of London's most elegant women seemed to be concentrated in the corner by the door : besides Mrs. D'Erlanger, who wore a curious bracelet of her native cairngorms, there were Mrs. Richard Guinness and her daughter, Miss ' Baby ' Jungman ; Lady George Cholmondeley ; Lady Dashwood, with her purple gloves, but without, for once, the premier baronet ; the Hon. Mrs. Henry (' Wistful-Madonna ') McLaren ; and Lady Wimborne.

" Hostesses, semi-hostesses, and demi-semi-hostesses, young and old, quavery and crotchety, thronged round Miss Olga Lynn, the organiser of the concert, with deserved congratulations, and fished for supper invitations from the duke.

" Only Lord Moore wore a black tie. He takes music seriously."

The social column should not be scorned. It sheds revealing sidelights on the life of our times for the benefit of our grandchildren. In any case it is indispensable to our analysis of the epoch.

CHAPTER V

THE RESTAURANT HABIT

Crazes of the 'Twenties—Jazzmania—Growth of dancing and night-life—D.O.R.A. and anti-D.O.R.A.—Decline of clubs—Society's change of address.

THIS hypothetical grandchild of ours will discover many odd crazes reflected in the newspapers of this period, and, if he is discriminating, he will be able to sift out from momentary fashions those which had any lasting effect on our habits and which arose from some fundamental source of change.

He will find, for instance, that the invention of the motor-scooter did not revolutionize the locomotion of the 'twenties. He will read how Sir Henry Norman gave Lady Norman one for a birthday present, how Shirley Kellogg used to shop on one and Admiral Hall, while Director of Intelligence "scooted" along on night enquiries; he will read Mr. Paul Bewsher's prophecy of the "birth of an entirely new era in locomotion" with special "scooter-ways" on either side of the roads and in the parks. But he will conclude that a somewhat serious "scooter" accident to Sir Philip Sassoon, due to some confusion of the accelerator with the "stop" lever, spelt death to the scooter habit, and he will note as significant the fact that Sir Philip shortly afterwards purchased an aeroplane.

He will smile at an innovation in hattery, "the *Daily Mail* Sandringham Hat." He will be pardoned for assuming its instant popularity, seeing that it was worn by such distinguished persons as Mr. Winston Churchill (the "hat-king" among politicians), King Manoel of Portugal, Sir William Orpen and Mr. Owen Nares. But if he is any grandson of ours he will not take this circumstance at its face valuation in view of the complete absence of the *Daily Mail* hat from illustrations in newspapers of 1920 other than the *Daily Mail*.

Our grandson will observe a procession of sports and indoor games with short powers of survival: pogo, put-and-take, mah-jong, midget golf, yo-yo; and others, such as contract bridge and greyhound racing, possessed of greater stamina in the struggle for life. He will deduce an introspective race from the prevalence of psycho-analysis and the teachings of Freud, and, perhaps, a communistic one from the development of community singing! He will read of the Mormons and Monsieur Coué and Miss Aimée Semple MacPherson and Monsieur Voronoff, noting the duration of each as a popular topic; but from the continuous popularity of spiritualists, fortune tellers, necromancers, numerologists and casters of horoscopes, and from the curious unwillingness of Englishmen to sit thirteen at table, walk under ladders, and so forth, he will conclude that certain sections of the society of the period were very much swayed by superstition.

Hitherto he will not be far wrong. But what will he make of the dancing craze? Will he recognize its significance?

Dancing has become so much a matter of course in

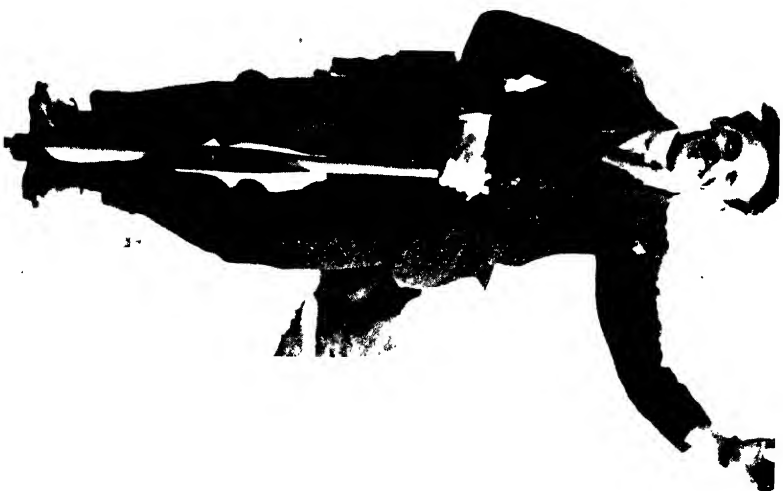
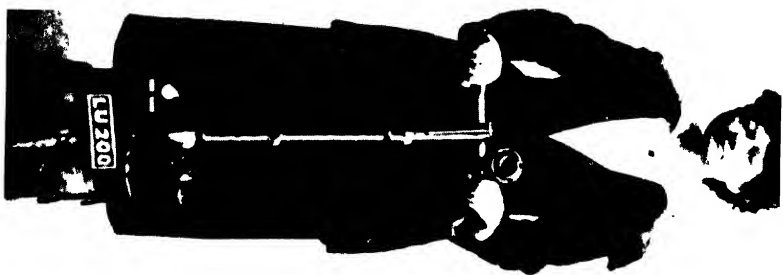
our social life that it is hard to visualize it as a craze. Yet such indeed it was, at the beginning of the 'twenties. People came back from the War full of nervous energy and money to spend. They were not content to sit quietly at home. They wanted to be up and about and to have a "good time." And dancing was the outlet which this impulse discovered. It became a mania.

Journalists wrote of "A NIGHT IN THE JAZZ JUNGLE." "The dancing craze," they said, "is, spiritually as well as literally, a case of the jumps." "Jazz" was a noisy, crude affair, with none of the rhythmic grace which dancing has today. The music of the early jazz-bands was strident and chaotic. Saxophones had not yet arrived. There was much percussion. Drums and rattles and bells and whistles and hooters played their part, and banjos twanged a rhythm. The dancing was akin to that of St. Vitus.

No day passed but what the newspapers featured the latest developments of the craze. Mr. Gerald Cumberland on "JAZZMANIA" in the *Daily Mail* reads like very ancient history :

"Women dressed as men. Men dressed as women—especially men dressed as women. Youths dressed in bathing-drawers and kimonos. Matrons moving about lumpily and breathing hard. Bald, obese men perspiring a million pores. Everybody terribly serious ; not a single laugh : not even the palest ghost of a smile . . . Slide, slip, twist, turn, bend, bump, begin again : more gliding, more slipping : frantic noises from half a dozen coloured men with gold teeth and instruments of alleged music : an occasional howl of ecstasy from the players. Dim lights, drowsy odours in the air, futurist drawings on walls and ceiling. Movement,

TWENTIES



every kind of movement : colour, ravishing, kaleidoscopic ; men and women gliding hither and thither in a mysterious maze. Slide, slip, twist and turn. . . It is the jazz.

“ The madness has seized London, it is spreading to the provinces, and soon the Shetland islanders will cease tending their sheep—if they *do* tend sheep—and pass their nights and days in this blessed consummation of our wearied civilization.”

Feverishly, young and old took lessons. The steps were changing all the time. Who today remembers the Twinkle, the Jog Trot, the Vampire, the Missouri Walk, the Hesitation, the Elfreda or the Camel Walk ? There was the shimmy, then the “ blues,” a reaction to slower and more sinuous movement. But the Charleston, in 1926, soon brought the jerks back, to be succeeded by the short-lived and reactionary Yale.

Of course there was an outcry of moral disapproval. Bishops naïvely awoke to the sexual significance of dancing (an aspect of it which seemed unaccountably to have escaped the attention of previous generations). “ The use of these dances or any dances as means of raising money for memorials in honour of the gallant dead who have laid down their lives for the nation and the Empire,” said Bishop Welldon, “ is little less than a national humiliation. Is there no sense of propriety or congruity left ? ” A prominent surgeon exposed the “ great degradation and demoralization of these wild dances.” The Leyton Urban Council, in letting the municipal hall for dances, went so far as to prohibit the one-step and the jazz in any form. And Lady Dorothy Mills defiantly explained, “ WHY I JAZZ: Because I like it.” Analogies were drawn (not altogether incorrectly)

between jazz music and jazz minds, and an early old-age was prophesied for those girls who were sacrificing their nerves and their beauty to the hypnotism of the foxtrot.

The Government was still using nearly all the large halls for war purposes, so that at first it was hard for dance promoters to find rooms ; but soon new halls were being opened every day. Even some of the large stores started ballrooms, so that people could dance in the intervals of shopping. They were not content to dance in the evenings only.

“ A dance as you pass by, a couple at tea and a few at dinner to punctuate the courses ! ” said an article. “ One afternoon I was sharing a taxicab to Clubland with a Stock Exchange man. Tapping on the window, the broker stopped the cab outside a dance club. We jumped out, and at his invitation I entered the club.

“ Throwing his hat and coat at an attendant he ran downstairs, quickly located a lady he knew, dashed up to her, asked for a dance and got it. The music over, he seated his partner, took me by the arm, trotted upstairs, and was back in the taxicab—all in a very few minutes.

“ ‘ Just thought of it on the spur of the moment,’ he said. . . . ‘ I couldn’t resist just one, as I had a spare ten minutes. I hope you didn’t mind waiting.’ ”

“ Dance mad ? Well, he *seemed* sane enough. After all, why shouldn’t one have a dance as one used to take a cup of tea—pop in and pop out without thinking twice about it ? Dancing is certainly harmless—and everybody’s doing it ! ”

Subscription dances were the habit, and of these the most fashionable were the “ controlled ” dances at the Grafton Galleries. Here, at first, almost military strictness prevailed ; the chairman was in fact a major-general. The sale of tickets was

rigorously supervised, due enquiries being made as to the credentials of each purchaser. No lady was admitted without a gentleman, except under the wing of the "hostess" of the evening, who was usually a woman with a "name". Between 350 and 450 people used to dance here nightly to a negro band, from 10.30 p.m. to 2.30 a.m., and sometimes the crowd amounted to 800.

In time more and more restaurants and hotels introduced dancing, and dance clubs increased. So began the habit of "going out" in the evenings, with which Englishwomen had not, hitherto, been familiar. For, with a few exceptions, restaurants, before the War, and particularly dance clubs, were not regarded as suitable places even for married women. Now they became a normal feature of social life.

There were hardly more restaurants in London before the War than there had been in the 'eighties, when the Savoy was opened. The Café Royal, Verrey's (where Tennyson, Gladstone and Henry Irving used to go), the St. James's (which was popular with the *jeunesse dorée*), Scotts, Simpsons, the Pall Mall and the Amphitriton, which was the nearest approach to the modern fashionable restaurant, were almost the only places where you could dine out. Hence, dancing was the principal factor in adding to the list; so much so that today it is hard to find a good restaurant where you can dine without the accompaniment of dance music. The Savoy was the first restaurant to popularize dancing with meals. At first people danced in clubs like the Embassy and Ciro's, which are still very popular today. But as more restaurants appeared so did

they become more popular, as providing a freer atmosphere.

It was not, however, until the Licensing Act of 1921 removed some of the D.O.R.A. restrictions that restaurant life in London began to get under way. Then it was a slow and painful process, hindered at every turn.

In 1913 visitors to England from the United States spent approximately £36,000,000 in London. In 1921 they spent just half that amount. Whereas before the War the Savoy had been serving between 750 and 850 suppers per night, now they were serving no more than 450 or 500. And this despite the fact that London was thronged with visitors and avid for amusement. It was obvious that something must be done; London was too dull, too restricted.

What was done was wholly inadequate. Mr. A. P. Herbert and the London public have never ceased to revile that Licensing Act of 1921. Yet at the time—after some contretemps with the individual licensing justices—it was received with open arms. People had suffered to such an extent from the War restrictions that they could be pardoned, in the heat of the moment, for mistaking a modified freedom for the genuine article. Joyfully they sat down to order their unwanted sandwiches with after-theatre drinks, joyfully they submitted to their glasses being removed from the tables at 12.30. It was uncommonly charming of their rulers to allow them out at all. This was real freedom at last!

They had asked for bread and been given a stone. But the poor innocents couldn't taste the difference. It was not until too late that they awoke to the

mean advantage which had been taken of them by the Puritan element in the Government and by the kind of M.P. who said, "I always go home early anyway."

They soon realized the official attitude when the Midnight Follies at the Metropole, the first attempt to introduce cabaret on a big scale into London, were banned by the L.C.C. Even a clergyman, who visited the Metropole, found only one woman's dress which was, "perhaps, not quite discreet" (he found on enquiry, however, that the wearer was not a performer, but an onlooker), and the general outcry against the L.C.C.'s action reverberated through the Press for days. A compromise was finally reached; but the whole incident was typical of the official attitude towards its amusements which the public would have to expect in the future.

In 1922 a "Brighter London Society" was formed, beneath an imposing array of names, including the Bishop of Birmingham, Mr. Gordon Selfridge, Mr. Nevinston, and Viscount Curzon (Lord Howe). But that it achieved little will be found by comparing its grandiloquent pretensions with the actual state of London today. The "Brighter London Society" set itself:

To make London economically the most worthy and beautiful city in the world.

To dispel drabness, abolish its smoke evil, and dispense its too frequent fogs.

To beautify the river approaches and lengthen the Embankment.

To object to the erection of ugly buildings and structures, but assist in every way the overcoming of unnecessary restrictions.

To help the theatres, hotels, restaurants and shops

in the Metropolis, increase their facilities, and thus attract the merchants and tourists of the world.

To beautify the lighting of buildings and streets.

To improve the streets and ban excessive noises.

To beautify public places and improve the parks.

"In a phrase," added the manifesto, "the object of the society is to make the metropolis the magnet of the world. All who travel know that in the foreign mind London is associated with dullness and drabness and lack of gaiety, and this Society hopes to alter the viewpoints of other nations and to attract them to our capital."

That few of its high-sounding aims were ever realized was partly due to its extra deferential attitude. When, for instance, there was a threat that the licensing magistrates would rescind their decision to allow supper drinks in certain hotels and restaurants, the "Brighter London Society" addressed them thus :

"We, the undersigned, wish to express our gratification to the Licensing Magistrates of the area covered by the theatres for their very kind interpretation of the recent Licensing Act . . . and respectfully urge that the concession thus granted may be made permanent."

"Thus," commented Mr. Ralph Nevill, "might a body of slaves address an Oriental Despot !"

Those at the head of the "Down with Dora" movement today, on the other hand, tend to adopt a blustering attitude, accompanied by a naïf ignorance of the fundamentals of the problem. Nor have they yet made more impression on our childish legislation than the apocryphal "Brighter Londoners" did.

Still, their pretensions are less vague and highfalutin. They stand for :

(1) The legitimate and irrefutable claim of the law-abiding public to freedom from all repressive and obsolete legislation.

(2) The abolition of the anomalies in the entertainment, trading and licensing laws and of unjust discrimination occasioned by "local option" and local licensing in certain districts.

(3) The restoration of liberties and status to bona-fide clubs.

(4) No sectarian interference with the individual's right to spend his Sunday as he wishes.

(5) The opening of licensed houses during reasonable hours and the removal of all insane legislation necessitating the purchase of meals—i.e., sandwiches, etc., to enable the purchaser to obtain alcoholic refreshment.

(6) The liberation of inns and hotels from all the fussy restrictions which handicap their legitimate trade and prevent them catering adequately either for British or foreign tourists.

(7) The safeguarding of shop assistants and bartenders, etc., as regards their hours of work, but no further interference with the tradesman's right to serve his customers as and when he pleases.

(8) The right of the citizen to indulge in innocent pastimes, viz.: sweepstakes, preferably State-controlled, cards, and other games of skill or chance (at present even cocoanut shies are illegal, and a person taking part in a sweepstake is liable to a heavy fine and imprisonment, also to be classed as a "Rogue and Vagabond." Surely an amazing state of affairs!).

(9) The licensing of restaurants in public parks to enable the hard-working British people to enjoy their over-taxed beer under the same decent and civilized conditions as the working classes of Austria, Germany and France.

(10) The immediate restoration of the "Liberty of the Subject."

It is doubtful whether London will ever be galvanized into any semblance of night life, for we are inherently a "stay-at-home" race. It is bourgeois life, not high life, that makes a city gay. Paris is essentially a middle-class city. But the English middle classes like to sit over their own firesides of an evening. Paris life is in the streets. London life is congregated privately in some millions of homes; though lately it has shown some signs of "breaking out."

The licensing grievance can be exaggerated. The law, indefensible in theory, suits the majority in practice. After all, it is simply a variation of the principle, "one law for the rich, another for the poor," but with a bias on the side of the poor, for once. It is only the rich, because of the late hour at which they dine, who wish to drink after ten o'clock at night. In fact it soon became apparent that nothing would stand in the way of the young people of the 'twenties in search of amusement. The restaurant habit flourished and grew to wide proportions. Clubs either broke the law or made the best of it as it stood.

One effect of the Act was the rapid growth of a squalid night club underworld, from which Scotland Yard seemed unable or unwilling to distinguish the reputable article. Mushroom night clubs sprang up in their hundreds. Most of them were underground and appropriately lifeless. All of them were expensive. Most sold drinks after legal hours. Yet at a glance an observer could tell which were the respectable clubs and which were not. Not so the police.

Nor, apparently, our legislators. When I was editing the social column of the *Daily Sketch* a letter

arrived one morning from the solicitor of an angry M.P. It read as follows :

“ As a Member of Parliament and a man holding responsible positions in the City of London and elsewhere, Major Kindersley strongly resents the publicity you have given to his name in association with the Gargoyle Club and the apparently unusual fancy dress dance to be held under its auspices.

“ If the author of the offending article had taken any trouble to verify his facts before submitting them for publication he would have been satisfied that Major Kindersley would strongly resent the use of his name in connection with the Club in question and its fancy dress activities.

“ As a Member of Parliament it is of the utmost importance that his constituents should realize that he does not feel it consistent with the dignity of his duties to them to be in any way associated with a fancy dress dance such as is indicated in your columns.

“ Our client is loath to give more publicity to the statement complained of appearing in your paper, but must, in order to safeguard his position, insist that you insert in tomorrow's issue of your paper at the correspondence page a disclaimer as follows :

‘ We regret that in our issue of the 17th instant we stated in the columns of this page that Major Guy Kindersley is a member of the Gargoyle Club, and would attend the sixth anniversary celebrations. Major Guy Kindersley is not a member of, or in any way associated with the Club, and we are informed, had not at any time any intention of being present at the fancy dress dance. We apologize for the mistake we have made.’ ”

This was readily published in full, and it was only necessary to add names of the committee of the Gargoyle Club, which had been started by Mr. David Tennant under the benevolent patronage of his

stepfather, Lord Grey of Fallodon, and has survived as a flourishing and respectable concern. The committee were Lord Glenconner, Lord Henry Cavendish-Bentinck (M.P. till 1929), Mr. Arnold Bennett, Count Bernstorff, of the German Embassy, and Mr. A. P. Herbert.

The police, possibly, could not be blamed for interpreting the letter of a ridiculous law. But the situation so created was fantastic. It was, after all, always easy for a club to exclude undesirables and many of the night clubs were frequented primarily by the fashionable world. Thirty peers were stated to be members of the Kit Cat Club, and the Prince of Wales used to go there nightly. By 1927 even débutantes were allowed in night clubs, and Eddie Tatham's "Night Light" proudly boasted two princesses, a brace of earls and two more lords on its committee! Yet the police chose to regard all these noblemen as suspected criminals. The Quadrant used to be as strongly guarded as the Tower of London itself. It had three bolted doors, the third of which had a wicket. In the bureau was a push-bell, worked by foot, which rang a buzzer in the bar and another in the lounge, so that drinks could be hastily removed in case of alarm. The police were only able to obtain evidence of illegality by prying in through a skylight to see if people were enjoying themselves. Having decided that they were, they promptly raided the club. Could any situation be more undignified than that of an innocent and often esteemed seeker after amusement forced to barricade himself like a bandit to escape detection in his nefarious purpose?

In time, however, such precautions were dispensed

with. People resigned themselves to the fact that night life was a crime and preferred to take an open risk of being caught. But the raid and conviction of Chez Victor, which had reigned justly supreme over fashionable London for two years, broke their spirit. Night-club ardour was damped, and within two years Lord Byng was able to boast that he had killed the night life of London. Most of the clubs were driven out of business, and those ladies and gentlemen who suffered, modishly, from insomnia were forced into bed at 2 a.m.

Since then there has never been any appreciable night-club revival. Of course there will always be places in London where drinks may be obtained after hours: the fines are so disproportionate to the profits that it will always be worth somebody's while to run them. Several ingenious spirits conceived the "bottle-party" idea, whereby a night club was enabled to pose as a private party, due to the rule that patrons must order their drinks through an agency in advance. But this, too, was soon scotched by the law. One enterprising youth, superannuated from a public school at the age of seventeen, opened a night club last year, decorating it entirely on credit at a big store. His premises had been disqualified from use as a club before he took them over; but this concerned him not at all. Beardless and debonair, he held the bar in person, for two months, selling drinks without concealment until all hours of the morning. The fact that the police never raided him (he finally gave up the club because he felt like a holiday in the South of France) is perhaps a proof of the esteem in which the public-school spirit is universally held.

But these are glorious exceptions. Night life, as we knew it in the 'twenties, has virtually ceased to exist. Does it, in fact, exist anywhere? Paris is not what it was. Berlin, which threatened to oust Paris a few years ago, is dead. The spirit of night life is gone.

It is not unnatural. Night life is a sporadic growth. It arose from the War, when it was a reaction from misery and horror. After the War it provided a nervous outlet. At the time people spoke of the night-life craze as of something which was no more than the immediate consequence of the peace and which would subside of its own accord within a few months. In fact it lasted ten years, requiring an economic crisis to drive the last nail into its coffin. But, even in London, where it was so hampered, night life, as long as it lasted, had a spontaneous quality and a feeling of genuine *abandon*.

Meanwhile restaurant life, as apart from night life—a habit which presupposes no feeling of insomnia or abnormal excitement—flourishes more than ever it did. So prosperous an industry has it become that restaurant proprietors can afford to spend as much as £50,000 on redecoration schemes every few years; bands cost them £12,000 or £13,000 a year, and cabaret turns anything up to £1000 a week. Cabaret made its way in when the first flush of the dancing craze died away, and it is now a permanent feature of West End life.

The increase of dancing and restaurant life has radically altered the nature of London's clubland. It soon became evident, after the War, that clubs, in their old sense, were an anachronism. Before the War young men used to belong to three or four

London clubs, each with a subscription of fifteen or twenty guineas per year. Now few can afford more than one. Moreover their habits have changed. The club was the luxury of the leisured man. *He would* drop in there lazily at some time during the day and exchange current gossip with his men-friends. But now there are too few leisured men. Almost every young man has to work in the daytime, with the result that, when he is free in the evening, he prefers feminine society. His brain is tired, and talking to women is not calculated to strain it further. As a result, a great number of men's clubs now admit women to certain rooms.

But this invasion is insufficient to save them. Many have abolished entrance fees and drastically reduced subscriptions for young members. None, now, adhere to the principle on which they were originally founded. Married men belong to the Bachelors' ; and the Travellers, of which, originally, each member must have travelled at least 1000 miles in a direct line from London, now harbours many whose taste for travel is unlikely to lure them beyond the Place Pigalle. Even the political clubs, like the Junior Carlton and the Reform, have loosened or abandoned their party qualifications. Cocktail bars have been introduced in such ancient strongholds as White's and the St. James's. But even such concessions as these are insufficient to save the average club from a state of perpetual financial crisis. Young men want more for their money. They want to be occupied and amused for £15 15s. a year. Conversation and good wine alone no longer satisfy them. They must have squash courts and swimming baths. "Do you mean to say," exclaimed a youthful guest,

looking round my club in surprise, "that there isn't a piano?" If a young man is going to join a club at all he prefers a cocktail club or a dance club, where at least he can amuse himself with his womenfolk. Cocktail clubs, in particular, are a notable development of the last few years.

All of which indicates the general decline of bachelor life consequent on the greater freedom between the sexes.

The housing problem helped to make the restaurant a feature of social life. People could no longer afford to live in large houses. They required too many servants, and servants in any case were hard to obtain. One after another the big mansions gave place to flats; Devonshire House went first, Grosvenor House soon followed. In many of the squares—notably Portman Square—blocks of comfortable service flats supplanted unwieldy houses, or else the latter were themselves converted into apartments, until even the rich began to prefer flat life.

But flats did not solve everybody's problem. The Englishman is not a flat dweller by nature: he is incurably attached to the idea of his own front door. Where that front door is matters not, provided it be his own. So people who could no longer afford big houses, bethought themselves of mewses. "SOCIETY WOMAN," said the newspapers, "LIVES IN A STABLE." Now no mews in Mayfair is without its "cottagey" residences where smart women live, usually with a garage beneath them. Otherwise they migrated to the slums, where houses were small, with the result that mean streets around Westminster and Knightsbridge became suddenly fashionable.

In any case there was little space to entertain at home, beyond a few guests for cocktails. It was simpler, if you invited friends to dinner, to take them to a restaurant ; if not for dinner, afterwards, since you could hardly expect them to spend a whole evening in so cramped a space.

Even those who still lived in big houses got into the habit of taking their parties to restaurants and dance clubs, and the private party, of which, before the War, there had been quantities every night of the season, became less and less frequent.

CHAPTER VI

YOUTH AND INFORMALITY

Death of formal entertaining—Society loses political influence—
The Ellesmere gate-crashers—New hostesses—The cocktail
party—"Catching 'em young."

THE restaurant habit killed formal entertaining. But formal entertaining had already lost its *raison d'être*. In the nineteenth century the principal function of Society was political. Politicians attached great importance to its ordinances, and, as Mr. Ralph Nevill remarks, the social functions of the London season were almost as important as meetings of the Cabinet. Disraeli was very conscious of the political importance of the dinner party and calculated that in one year alone he entertained 450 different people to dinner. Sir William Harcourt once dined out a whole week in advance of his invitations, not discovering his error until the Friday night, when his hostess politely informed him that he had been expected the following Friday. Today it is inconceivable that a Cabinet Minister should have a week, far less a season, of purely social engagements. Most ministers today do not move in Society at all. Mr. Neville Chamberlain, for instance—unlike his brother Austen—has never dreamt of so doing.

The old Whig and Tory hostesses had great political importance, and their *entourages* kept strictly apart.

It was not until the middle 'eighties, when the "Souls" were formed, on a basis of pure intellect, independent of party distinctions, that political opponents ever met one another in social life. It is very different today, when you can see Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Socialist Premier, dining *tête-à-tête* at *Boulestin's* with Lady Londonderry, the official Conservative hostess, on the night of the Budget !

Newcomers to Parliament could not afford to disregard Society ; their careers depended on it, for political dinners and receptions provided the only opportunity of personal contact with their chiefs. It was Lady Dorothy Nevill's Sunday luncheons which inspired the Primrose League. Lady St. Helier entertained men of both parties. She was once accused of having the House of Commons specially "counted out" for one of her evening receptions. Wednesday, which was an "off-night" in the House, was the day usually chosen by political hostesses, and Lady Stanhope used to give a large dinner and reception every night during the session of Parliament. The last great political lady in London Society was the "Double Duchess," of Devonshire and, subsequently, Manchester, who, by her good judgment and discretion, wielded considerable influence.

But Edwardian Society was not deeply concerned with politics. It preferred racing and baccarat. As Miss Sackville-West says, people spoke of them

"with a proprietary and casual familiarity, somewhat as though politics were children that they entrusted to the care of nurses and tutors, remembering their existence from time to time, principally in order to complain of the inefficient way the nurses and tutors

carried out their duties ; but although they were careful to give an impression of being behind the scenes, like parents who go up to the nursery once a day, their acquaintance remained oddly remote and no more convincing than an admirably skilful bluff. It was founded . . . on personal contact with politicians ; ' Henry told me last week . . . ' or ' A.J.B. was dining with me and said . . . ' but their chief desire was to cap one another's information."

Edwardian hostesses, when they entertained the political world, did so wholesale. They had no personal interest in the majority of the guests at their political receptions, which henceforward defeated their own object.

Today no hostess exercises political influence. Lady Astor, it is true, fills her house with politicians ; but the dread of lemonade keeps many away, and it is no longer important that they should attend such functions. There is plenty of opportunity for young men to meet the chiefs of their party informally and, therefore, to greater effect, elsewhere. Lady Wimborne, a woman of real intelligence, is the only hostess who might, if she so wished, keep a political salon today. Indeed it was over the luncheon table at Wimborne House that the General Strike was settled. But Lady Wimborne has chosen otherwise. Lady Cunard, in common with many of her social colleagues, prefers to patronise the arts. Lady Londonderry is the only big political hostess, and her eve of the session receptions, often held in the afternoon, are now no more than a formality.

" . . . It was a familiar setting and a splendid one," said the *Daily Express* in 1929, " the like of which could not be seen anywhere else in the world. Yet it was different last night from what it had been the year



Mrs. Corrigan



Miss Lisa
Maxwell



Mme. Alfredo
de Pena



Lady Cunard

before. The crush was less. In 1928 one was wedged in a solid block on the way to the cloakroom, and it took, with luck, twenty minutes to reach the hostess. On July 1, 1929, the formality was accomplished in less than five minutes.

“ If there were fewer people so also was there less colour. Uniforms were scarce. Men wore their decorations, but not the toggling that went with them. All the ex-Ministers were in ordinary sombre evening dress, relieved in only a few cases, as in Sir Austen Chamberlain’s, by an obligatory touch of colour.”

It is a sign of the times that invitations to many parties at Londonderry House are now worded as follows :

YE ARCHAIC ARK ASSOCIATION
Londonderry House, Park Lane.
Her Arkship, Circe the Sorceress,
commands the attendance of

at a feast to be held in the Antediluvian
Dining-den of the Ark.

The other principal object of formal entertaining was the introduction of a daughter into the marriage market. In this connection antediluvian fashions do persist. It is still commonly supposed by many mothers that the only way to entertain for a débutante daughter is to give a large dance : that is to say, to hire somebody else’s house for a night at £150, order a band from a band agency, a cartload of flowers from a florist, servants and a champagne supper from a catering company, and invite some hundreds of more or less unknown young ladies and gentlemen to partake of the whole, which has cost something in the neighbourhood of £1000. These

curiously impersonal entertainments do still function in the neighbourhood of Pont Street and Eaton Square, throughout the London season. Moreover, since the Crisis they are often denied even the saving grace of champagne, beer being provided instead to warm the cockles of the tired young man. The idea that balls are a good marriage investment has long since been exploded. Their complete lack of intimacy is an effective ban to any matrimonial proposal and their only apparent object—by a not very vicious circle—to secure for the débutante invitations to other such ponderous entertainments in the course of the season. Most mothers have realized that it pays better to enter the marriage market in a more informal and personal spirit ; that it is more sensible to lay out your £1000 on a number of smaller entertainments : some week-ends in the country, a theatre party or two, and supper parties in dance restaurants, which, even the stiffest dowager has come to realize, are not haunts of depravity.

For the principle of formal entertaining in the pre-war sense was virtually exploded by the Ellesmere gate-crashing scandal of 1928. Lady Ellesmere gave a ball at Bridgewater House, at which there were three hundred guests whom she did not recognize. She picked upon four of the guests and invited them to leave. They left. But that was only the beginning. For Lady Ellesmere subsequently announced that she wished the fullest publicity to be given to the names of the uninvited guests, in order to put a stop to a nuisance which was becoming prevalent in Society. Then the fun began.

The "Great Mayfair War" raged in the Press for over a week, in the course of which interviews were given by Lady Ellesmere, Lord Ellesmere, the guests who were turned out, their brothers, their mothers, other uninvited guests who were not turned out, and *their* mothers, other hostesses, and indeed anybody in the social world who felt they would like to add something to the controversy.

And the significant point was that public opinion, on the whole, was sympathetic to the gate-crashers. When the Ancaster and the Denman families became embroiled the *Daily Express*, which is the modern social oracle, was malicious enough to discover that "The Ancaster family trace their lineage to Robert Willoughby, a baron in the reign of Edward I; the first holder of the title of Earl of Ellesmere was Lord Francis Leveson-Gower, who was created a peer in 1846. The first Lord Denman, who was Lord Chief Justice, was born in 1779."

The burden of the gate-crashers' argument was that it was nowadays quite usual, when invited to a party, to bring a few friends along as well. The average hostess was always pleased to see the friends of her friends. The more the merrier. And this indeed was generally the case, so informal had entertaining become. Obviously, however, this principle, which suited a cocktail party, could not be applied to an anachronism like the ball at Bridge-water House. This sort of function was a survival from the past, and must be treated with the respect due to the dead.

On the other hand, that such a ball did not conform to its pre-war counterpart was evident from the fact that Lady Ellesmere did not know so many even

of her invited guests by sight. An old-fashioned ball, run under Edwardian rules, merited respect. But Lady Ellesmere's had not conformed to those rules ; hence it was a mockery.

Social ethics had become very confused ; that was evident. Lady Ellesmere complained that she had discovered a man present at her ball who brought his wife with him. She had not known he was married, and had invited him as a bachelor. To this a member of the Cavendish-Bentinck family replied in a letter to the *Daily Express*.

" I was somewhat astonished," he wrote, " to note in a statement made to your representative by a prominent hostess, who recently took exception to the presence at her ball of guests whose faces were unintelligible to her, that she was writing for an apology to a gentleman who came duly invited but with his wife, whose name had been omitted from the invitation.

" If I did not know the high standard of your printing I should have thought that an error must have occurred, and that the hostess in question was writing an apology to the gentleman for having asked him without his wife, as I am under the impression that he is discourteous, in fact offensively rude, to invite a married man without his wife where other ladies are bidden.

" As the hostess was unaware that he was married, she was accidentally instead of purposely impolite and should surely express regret for this apparent discourtesy. Whilst I am surprised at the gentleman attending the ball in the circumstances, yet he may have thought that his wife's name was omitted from the invitation by error. Nevertheless, if I were in his position, not even the threat of the ' fullest publicity,' which the peeress in question wishes to give to the names of those whom she considers culprits, would extract any apology from me ! "

Lord Castlerosse quoted a similar letter :

“ To all young men in London of passable parentage, manners and appearance, with enough money to keep a fair dress suit and pay their laundress, the uninvited or ‘ unwanted ’ hostess has become an increasing problem.

“ A week never passes but I receive several of those familiar envelopes containing an important card which announces to me that some lady with a resonant name will be at home to me.

“ In nine cases out of ten I do not know her, and I do not want to know her, and yet she asks me ; more, she demands an answer, without doing me the courtesy of enclosing the usual stamped and addressed envelope. At the height of the season the mere expense of postage becomes considerable . . . ”

“ It does occur to me,” the letter concluded, “ that the scope of a hospitality which is so lavish and indiscriminate as to extend to complete strangers in large numbers does run the risk of expanding more widely, even to the much-abused uninvited guests.

“ . . . personal hospitality has from earliest times been one of the sweetest graces of human life ; . . . but when it comes to keeping ‘ open house ’ this Homeric brand of hospitality demands a different standard.”

The *Daily Express* leader aptly summed up the situation :

“ The ball at Bridgewater House promises to be as famous as the one before Waterloo and to lead to nearly as much fighting. It has often puzzled us why people should willingly go to such affairs, but now the mystery is clear. Where else can they get such fun as at a house where the hostess and half her guests are strangers to one another, where uninvited friends of a fully credentialled guest may be peremptorily asked to leave ; where married men who are mistakenly on the bachelors’ list may be called upon to apologize for bringing an unasked wife : and where the

evening's gaieties are prolonged far into the following day amid a tumult of back-chat, charges and counter-charges, and furious femininities? Formal balls had long seemed to us absolutely zero in the way of indoor sports. Clearly it was our mistake."

The old social order had been reduced to an absurdity. In the old days, when hostesses entertained on a large scale, they made it their business to know who everybody in Society was, and no "unknowns" could find their way in. But then social life was a far more intensive process than it is now. It was, for many, a whole-time job, so that in one season they would have the opportunity to make the acquaintance of some hundreds of people.

Today people move, far more, in informal cliques, and large-scale entertaining has become the exception. They have neither the time nor the patience for it. People like Lady Ellesmere have other things to think of besides social life. If, therefore, they choose, for some quixotic reason, to revert to type and give a large ball, it is not possible that their guests should be drawn exclusively from among people whom they know by sight. So they borrow "lists" from other hostesses and make from them a judicious selection of young men to complete the required number. Before the War, this system worked well enough, for the boundaries of Society were well defined, and no young men would have found himself on a list without he had due credentials of birth, breeding and, therefore, behaviour.

After the War, this could no longer be. Young men were scarce; hundreds who would once have been "outsiders" had now to be admitted to the

lists ; and their standards of behaviour were not the pre-war standards.

But then nor were the standards of those who would have been on the lists anyway. Young men of the noblest lineage had acquired quite a different attitude towards Society. In fact, they had no attitude at all towards Society as an institution. For them it was just a means of enjoying themselves in as easy-going a manner as possible.

One cannot but shed a tear for the passing of the old-fashioned ball. As an entertainment it was æsthetically perfect. Its exclusiveness, its elegance, its dignity made it beautiful. It represented splendour, where its modern equivalent represents display. It stood for an idea which was worthy of admiration. It was romantic, noble, exciting to the imagination.

Democracy is not a natural instinct of man ; aristocracy is. Democracy is a debased product of civilization. I was in Paris in 1931 when the Spanish Royal Family arrived after the Revolution. Outside the *Meurice* was a dense crowd shouting " *Vive le Roi !* " in rhythmical concert, and blocking the whole of the rue de Rivoli to traffic. Women, frenziedly Royalist, screamed " *Vive la Reine !* " in high, quavering voices when her Majesty appeared on the balcony with the King. I walked slowly home across the river, and from the Boulevard St. Germain on the left bank, I could still hear the cheering. Here was a republican crowd expressing a spontaneous recognition of the aristocratic principle. Two days later I went to the Gare de Lyon to see the President of the Republic arrive from his long Colonial tour. There were no crowds, beyond those who happened to be in the station at the time and who were

attracted to the barrier by the soldiers, the flags festooning the platform, and the red carpet. But when they saw what was happening they shrugged their shoulders. "*Ce n'est rien d'intéressant,*" they said. "*Ce n'est que le Président qui arrive.*" And they turned away. There was not a cheer as the President drove off in an unimpressive little motor car.

In England we still have Royal pageantry to satisfy our aristocratic instincts. But the pageantry of the aristocracy itself is no more, and can only be regretted.

The extent to which it has disappeared can be gauged by the rarity with which the great aristocratic names of old appear in the lists of hostesses. Take the duchesses. The Duchesses of Portland, Beaufort, Rutland, Devonshire, Buccleuch, Somerset and Richmond no longer entertain on any scale in London. The Duchess of Bedford is concerned principally with aviation; the Duchess of Marlborough with dog breeding. The Duchess of Sutherland used, in the 'twenties, to give a big annual ball; but now her entertainments are confined mainly to her own friends. The Duke of Westminster gave a ball some years ago, with one of his previous duchesses; but this was a flash in the pan. Lady Shaftesbury, Lady Waldegrave, Lady Spencer, Lady Pembroke are not London hostesses today. Lady Derby, Lady Lansdowne, Lady Stanhope entertain hardly at all. Yet all, in the last century, were famous names. The Greys and the Cecils, who used to rule Society, are now little more than a clique. So are the Russells. The majority of the aristocracy do not even have houses in London.

Some bearers of great names there are who still entertain on a formal scale, but they are principally Jews and others enriched since the 'eighties : Rothschilds, Sassoons, Monds, Lady Ludlow, and the relics of the Edwardians. Mrs. Arthur James remains exclusive ; so does Mrs. Ronald Greville ; so does Lady Howard de Walden. The Duchess of Roxburghe and Lady Granard, unlike most Americans, are far more exclusive than the English bigwigs themselves.

Lady Cunard is exclusive, though not consistently so. But she is the past-mistress of informal entertaining. She never has difficulty with gate-crashers. " Why should I ? I only ask the people I like," she said brightly after the Ellesmere episode ; and it is indeed a sign of the times that such a comment should be worth quoting. Lady Cunard is short, bright-eyed and perky. She gives three or four luncheon parties a week, which are rarely organized more than a day in advance. Most of her invitations are issued over the telephone. Lady Cunard is the modern hostess *par excellence*, and if you hear people say that they do not give a damn whether or not they are asked to her parties, you know that they are feeling sore. They are well aware that Lady Cunard is the one hostess in London worth cultivating, because at her house alone can you be sure of meeting interesting people and having fun into the bargain. Lady Cunard's conversation is not profound, but it is inspired and at her table it is always general.

Other American hostesses are more formal and less exclusive. Of many, indeed, it can be said that their formality is in directly inverse ratio to their

exclusiveness. Of such was the Mrs. Corrigan of a few years ago. No one could describe Mrs. Corrigan as informal. Her idea of an intimate little luncheon is a table laid for fifty covers. Nor, in the beginning, was she exclusive. But, through sheer persistence, Mrs. Corrigan is now become wellnigh as exclusive as her compatriot Lady Granard herself. The list of guests not invited to her last party would have aroused the frantic jealousy of many a minor American meteor. Mrs. Corrigan is short, tight-featured, determined. She is an interesting modern product. She does not, like Lady Cunard, entertain people because she likes them. She does not, like the pre-war hostesses, entertain people from a sense of responsibility or duty or habit; nor from an interest in what they will have to tell her of politics or art or the affairs of the mind. None of these things concerns Mrs. Corrigan. Mrs. Corrigan is, in fact, a very acute business woman, but she prefers to make Society her end in life. She entertains because she is ambitious—to entertain. Nor is she alone in this idiosyncrasy. There are many for whom modern society is an end in itself.

Incidentally, it was Mrs. Corrigan who popularized the fashion of cabaret parties. That is to say, instead of taking her guests to a restaurant to see a cabaret, she brought the atmosphere of the restaurant and the cabaret to them. The habit, today, is common among hostesses; for the moderns demand to be continuously entertained. Food and drink and conversation and dancing do not satisfy them at a party. And indeed, considering the conversation, it is hardly surprising.

Another American hostess, chiefly confined to

Paris, is Miss Elsa Maxwell. Miss Maxwell devotes her life to "keeping things moving." For Miss Maxwell, whose parties are usually given in somebody else's name, entertaining is a genuinely creative art. She takes as much pleasure in a successful party as an artist does in a successful picture. Her parties are never ordinary parties. She has an inexhaustible fund of ideas for making them unusual. While Mrs. Corrigan's imagination will stop short at cabaret, with jewelled garters and gold cigarette lighters for the guests, Miss Maxwell is continually devising new party games. Her parties have involved the discovery of a "murdered" guest and "scavenging" throughout the City for such diverse objects as a swan, a pompom from a sailor's hat, an autographed portrait of royalty and a genius; to say nothing of a series of highly original ideas for fancy dress. Miss Maxwell, like the other American hostesses, is short, but just about twice their girth. I once saw her (in Sicily) dressed as Lord Nelson. The spectacle amused Miss Maxwell quite as much as it did her friends.

Though at times it does seem that London Society is being run by an American syndicate, there are still a few English hostesses left. There are, for instance, Mrs. Henry MacLaren, and Lady Colefax and Mrs. Maugham, who entertain the social intelligentsia. But today a great proportion of the entertaining is in the hands of the young, who no longer require their elders to arrange their amusements.

The popularity of the cocktail began this revolution. Young people could give cocktail parties without any undue financial strain. They could even give them in their parents' houses and dissuade their parents from attending. Cocktail parties

became such a fashion that soon their parents started to give them too, and from being very much frowned upon as a vulgar frivolity, they have come to take the place of the Edwardian *conversazione* as a method of polishing off social obligations. Starting as an easy and informal way of entertaining your friends and theirs, the cocktail party increased in scope and size. In the hands of Madame Alfredo de Peña—a hostess with more vitality than all the other Americans put together, and who initiated the cocktail party into London in 1922—it became the sort of function which is apt to develop swollen but ecstatic proportions and to continue until all hours of the night. It became a staple dish. But always it remained essentially a young person's entertainment, and from the fact that it prevails today over every other, we can deduce that young people are all-important in post-war social life.

It was not the young who mattered in Victorian and Edwardian society. Mothers entertained for their débutante daughters ; but the latter, together with their young men, were kept very much in subjection. For the young, Society was little more than a marriage mart. In every other respect its amusements were designed for older people. But the post-war boom in youth, headed by the Prince of Wales, has brought a profound change. Youth is regarded as the one asset worth possessing. It is, in itself, the only virtue ; a talisman of brilliance and success. Everyone, as Wyndham Lewis says, is "younger-generationconscious." Instead of looking forward hopefully to the commanding maturity of middle age, people look back wistfully to the reckless confidence of youth, and do everything in their power

and in the power of fashion to recapture it. No hostess today can afford to dispense with the young. She must even rejuvenate herself. Youth is her chief stock-in-trade.

Ambitious hostesses saw that by "catching 'em young" they could quickly attain to the social position they coveted. For the young were now for the most part free from supervision, and could know whom they chose. Mrs. Corrigan in 1922 was entertaining Princess Marie-Louise, the dowagers and the ambassadors, with Titta Ruffo to sing after dinner. Ten years later she was entertaining Prince George, the young married couples, and the smarter débutantes, with the Embassy band to dance to.

In 1926 Lady Cunard, sensing the altered atmosphere, changed her name to Emerald. Soon she will have few guests old enough to remember her as Maud. This transition to the Emerald Age was an event of profound social significance.

CHAPTER VII

THE MODERN GIRL

Post-war fashions—The battle of the skirts—"Bobbed hair and bobbed love"—Equality of the sexes—Women in trade—Death of the chaperon.

WHAT women are wearing is a very adequate barometer of what women are thinking ; so that a review of post-war fashions will tell us quite a lot about post-war youth.

We start, of course, with the jumper craze, and the vogue for short skirts. The former arose out of the wartime knitting habit, when the whole female—not to mention the adolescent male—population worked feverishly to create mufflers and socks for the troops. When they had made enough mufflers to strangle half a dozen armies, women took to knitting jumpers for themselves. But this was more than a craze. The jumper symbolized free-and-easiness in dress, a thorough break from the stilted fashions of the past. Also, though jumpers for men did not become general till 1923, it had the merit of being a bi-sexual garment. It emphasized the equality of the sexes ; and this was the significant feature of the post-war woman's creed.

Short skirts emphasized that independence still further. Woman was claiming the right, not only to be comfortable, but to show her legs like men did. Women had worn breeches during the War. A

number of them defiantly continued to do so, but the majority changed into skirts which became progressively shorter as the years went on. Woman was to have mystery no longer. All that had been humbug, anyway. Was she not now working side by side with man? Had not almost every profession now been opened to her? This being so, it would be absurd to keep up such pretences even if she so desired. Nor did she so desire. It did not interest her to lure man on to the exploration of her mysteries. She preferred *camaraderie* to the inequalities of love. "For social success," said an article, ". . . you needn't be 'highbrowed' or well informed or accomplished or replete with parlour tricks—only 'jolly sporting,' unaffected, and you are pronounced 'topping' and 'simply it.'" So be it.

Of course the new fashions aroused a furore from the bishops and the dowagers. Father Bernard Vaughan weighed in early. "Today's fashions," he said, "are designed not to drape the human form and keep it warm, beautiful and comfortable, but to awaken in man unholy desires." The Pope described them as scandalous, and instantly ordered instructions regarding their immodesty to be forwarded to all the Catholic bishops. Viscountess Templetown started the dowagers off in the *Weekly Dispatch*: "Outrageous Dress . . . threatened devolution of the civilized woman of the twentieth century into the savage of unmemorial ages . . . the fashionable woman of a certain class . . . is rapidly returning to barbarism." Her Ladyship quoted an officer who did not dance at the Victory Ball because he "couldn't ask any of the women; they had not got enough on," and a French dress-

maker who said : “ *Madame, c’est la décadence d’un peuple.*”

An army of her kind supported her. “ The nude in sculpture suffices,” said the Duchess of Somerset. The Marchioness Townshend described modern dress as “ almost immoral in its inadequacy,” while Lady Hastings referred enigmatically to “ day undress and evening no-dress ” and (less enigmatically) to “ naked females ogled by coarse-minded men.” Lady Beecham, who was inclined to ascribe the new immodesty to the effect of “ Boche teachings ” (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and all that lot), quoted her small son who pointed to a woman in a box at the opera and asked, “ Is that lady naked ? ” Mrs. Stanley Baldwin, however, was commendably liberal. “ As life depends on the liver [*sic*],” she said, “ so does the wearing of dress depend on the wearer. A nice girl can wear anything and yet look nice ; an unpleasant one even in a nun’s robe remains unpleasant. Personally I do not go through life with disapproval in my eye and seeking where to place it.” (This, incidentally, must be the only recorded occasion on which Mrs. Baldwin has made a joke in public.)

Such outbursts read oddly today. It would occur to few to pillory modern dress as outrageous, demented and immodest. This is not only because our views have broadened. Undoubtedly the post-war dresses *were* indecent because they were inæsthetic. They displayed no sense of line. They were shapeless and sacklike. Wherefore they emphasized the new “ nudity ” without adorning it. I once saw a girl at a fancy dress ball (she must have been singularly lacking in vanity) disguised as a Gladstone bag. I can recall no spectacle more unpleasing or obscene.

But so do the post-war fashions seem to us after the passage of time, and so did they then seem to the bishops and dowagers. "Nowadays," said a fashion article of 1919, "nobody needs to have a figure. Figures have gone 'out.' Swelling curves are 'off.' Waists don't exist. The ideal of an identical appearance back and front is easily achieved."

"Waists don't exist!" That is to say, shape doesn't exist. Today swelling curves are still "off"; women still aspire to be as flat behind as in front. But figures are "in" again—not figures, perhaps, in the plural; but "a figure" to which all must conform. You cannot have any sort of figure you like. Oh dear me no! And the waist is an integral part of this standard figure.

Like Easter, it is movable: some years it may be above the navel, others down to the knees; but it will always occur somewhere. In the "short skirt" epoch the waist was highly promiscuous in its wanderings.

Moreover, the inherent bad taste of these dresses was reflected in their garish "jazz" colouring and the superfluous oddments of fringe which hung around them. We cannot now read of such horrors as "cretonne dazzle river gowns" without a shudder for what women have outgrown!

The post-war fashions were not dress fashions at all: they were the outward expression of an ethical, not an æsthetic, idea. They were the symbol of the new freedom. Women did not care what they looked like so long as they looked free. Now that they have attained freedom they have reverted to the æsthetic in dress. Line has come back. Clothes, not sacks, are "being worn." Women's clothes, today, are

more beautiful than they have been at any time in the present century. Women are proportionately more interested in clothes and less interested in freedom.

By 1922 Paris was wringing its hands. A determined attack must be launched upon the short skirt. But in the Battle of the Skirts, which raged for weeks in the Press, London was unanimously against Paris—even the artists. Only Miss Elspeth Phelps remarked how quaint some of the mothers had looked on the Fourth of June at Eton, walking with tall schoolboy sons and their skirts almost up to the knee. Patou, resigned, showed all ankles at his dress-show at the Metropole, but, with the sense of an artist, suddenly sprang a long dress on his audience: a dress of such perfection and beauty, worn so consummately by his most accomplished mannequin, that the audience gasped—and wavered. But the time was not yet ripe. The Englishwoman was not yet sure enough of her emancipation. A return to the long dress might imply a return to the pre-war conception of womanhood.

Incidentally it is curious to read, at the height of this rage for exiguous clothing, that “to be smart, the bathing-dress this year (1923) must be much fuller than formerly. A really high neck, finished perhaps with the inevitable cowboy scarf, and long sleeves are essential.”

By 1925 the skirt was so freakishly abbreviated that it sometimes ended at the knees. In 1926 it had become so short that employers of Birmingham waitresses, engaged on a “morality crusade,” forbade them to wear short skirts at all. But the revolution was slowly maturing. It began in the form of a

compromise, as indeed it remains today. Women would return to long dresses for evening wear, but for the daytime short skirts were too practical to be abolished. In 1927 there was a reaction towards crinolines and picture frocks for the evening. Lady Londonderry, at her own political reception, was in primrose-yellow brocaded satin, after Queen Anne. "The yoke, with its beautiful line across to the shoulders, was edged with narrow upstanding old lace, and the full skirt, gathered at the waist, almost touched the ground all round."

"Men go down like ninepins before a woman in an ancestral frock," said the *Daily Express*, "the lovely lines, the gracious beauty of those old-world times makes modern dress look hideous in a ballroom. The picture dress, however, must be designed by an artist or it becomes vulgar. There was a revival of the pannier dress not long ago, but it went out of fashion, for Miss Suburbia wore it, but did not know how to walk in it."

Women had always worn crinolines when they were politically powerful—in the reigns of Elizabeth, Anne and Victoria. Was the revival a sign that woman had acquired a new power, born of a new freedom? In any case, she went back to being a woman again, instead of a female agitator. Sex-appeal rather than sex-equality became her watchword. She almost reverted to being a creature of mystery. But not quite. For a few years later she put on trousers. And it is remarkable that this act should have passed relatively unchallenged. Neither the bishops nor the dowagers were roused. Woman had broken them in. Only seaside town councillors displayed any signs of alarm.

Meanwhile women had taken to smoking as a matter of course. In a County Court claim in 1922 it was suggested that fourteen cigarettes a day was a reasonable amount for any woman. Dr. Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, on the other hand, pronounced categorically that three or four were quite sufficient. Miss Anna Airy, an artist, admitted airily to smoking seven per day; but then, artists do these things. America was still behindhand in its immodesty. As late as 1923 Lady Eleanor Smith was charged by the American Women's Christian Temperance Union with having "publicly smoked a cigarette on the campus of Morningside College."

The short hair revolution ran parallel with that of the skirts, since both reflected woman's emancipation. Women had bobbed their hair during the War, but the practice did not become universal for some years afterwards. Newspapers of 1919 were still advertising means of preserving "woman's crowning glory," and the elaborate coiffure was still in favour. The International Hairdressers' Competition of 1920 was won by a monumental pile, in modification of the style of 1830, and surmounted by a large Spanish comb.

But in 1923, we read that "many men [*sic*], including M. Maurice Rostand, are wearing their hair long and permanently waved at Deauville, while women are almost all 'shingled,' as the Americans call the new very ugly bobbed and shaved haircut." Another bi-sexual fashion! I well remember when Miss Elizabeth Ponsonby came down to Oxford to display her newly shingled head. This was the first shingle I had seen, and it induced in me a feeling of astonishment coupled with faint horror. I was, in fact, shocked.



I was in good company. There was a great outcry in the Press : " BOBBED HAIR AND BOBBED LOVE " ; Lady Bland-Sutton on " SHINGLE'S BLOW TO MARRIAGE," with a violent counterblast the following week : " SHINGLED BRIDES POPULAR. Margaret Bannerman says that they are not jazz-mad." The agitation was world-wide. Ten nurses were suspended from a hospital in Columbus, U.S.A., until their hair should grow again. Three hundred women hairdressers conferred for days at a shrine in Tokio, Japan, invoking the aid of gods to turn women from this " dreadful practice."

But a short life was prophesied for short hair. Mr. Petrie Townshend even explained in a long article " WHY SHINGLED MODE DIED." Shingled hair, he said, was unnatural ; women's hair was intended to be long ; in another month not a cropped head would be seen on any woman with pretensions to smartness. Artists, who had championed the short-skirt movement thought that this was going too far, for once. Englishwomen, they said, were spoiling their proverbial beauty.

But so far from dying, the shingled mode gave place in the following year to the Eton crop, thus completing the bi-sexual process (" ETON CROPS BY AN ETONIAN : HIS BEAUTY SHOP IN MAYFAIR : MEN CLIENTS TOO ").

In time women began to grow their hair once more ; there came the chignon and the bingle and the bun. But it was obvious that, once they had cut it off, they would never again be bothered with long hair, except in a modified form. The old coiffures were unwieldy and unnatural. They falsified the true outline of the head, and truth was in the air. All outlines

must be shown ; and if the outlines of the figure were unsuited to the modern dress then the outlines must be changed, not the dress.

In other words, "slimming." Henceforward women submitted to a wearisome system of diet and exercise and massage, sacrificing pleasure, time, health, temper, and indeed looks for the sake of flat chests and boyish figures. Not merely would they dress like men and wear their hair like men and do all the things that men did, too ; but they must have the bodies of men into the bargain. Bi-sexualism apotheosized.

Of course, as soon as women got the vote it was only a question of time before they stepped into every trade and profession. In 1928 the membership of a certain woman's club represented the following trades : Aviator, Architect, Professor of Anatomy, Barrister, Colliery Owner, Electrical Contractor, Financier, House Decorator, Laundry Proprietor, Pharmacologist, Silk Merchant, and wholesale Wine-shipper !

Society women opened shops, which they fancifully christened by their own Christian names. Mrs. Dudley Coats (Mrs. Marshall Field) set the ball rolling with "Audrey," specializing in scent and wedding-presents. Mrs. Maugham ("Syrie") started a decorating establishment ; Miss Poppy Baring (Mrs. Peter Thursby) a dress shop ("Poppy") ; Mrs. Richard Norton ran a cinema (which was not, however, named "Jean") ; while other women whose names were continually before the public eye started laundries, beauty parlours, hotels, and so forth, finding an extensive clientèle among their friends.

This "playing at shops" aroused a good deal of resentment among the ordinary traders, who complained that they were "feeling the pinch." But those who were simply playing soon grew tired of the game; others found that friends, though they might be the best buyers, were not the best payers; while a few, like Lady Victor Paget, who had acumen and a capacity for hard work, built up successful businesses.

In any case, it became the rule, rather than the exception, for Society *débutantes* to take up some sort of employment. They were not too proud to serve as shop assistants, either among many hundred others in a big store, or else, superior, in the smaller and smarter dress-shops, hat-shops, flower-shops, book-shops and so forth.

Naturally, under such conditions, chaperonage was among the first of the old institutions to break down after the War. The dancing craze had started the breakdown. The older generation was at first much disturbed by the vogue of the dancing partner. Invitations were now sent out "and partner," and undesirable young men were alleged to be dancing their way into social circles through attaching themselves as permanent partners to young women; for steps were then so intricate that, having once learnt the ways of one man, you were reluctant to dance with another. "I myself," said a girl, in defence of the system, "have a partner who dances so divinely that I would never want to dance with any one else, and yet when we are not dancing he bores me to extinction." Dowagers complained that this spirit interfered seriously with the operations of the marriage-market since girls, wedded indissolubly to their

dance-partners, denied themselves the opportunity to meet men whom they could bear to talk to.

But there was nothing to be done about it. Dancing was not like bridge or conversation. It could not be practised in the cramped space of the home ; and so, short of preventing their daughters from indulging in it at all except on rare occasions in private houses, mothers could only allow them to go out to public places. At first they would religiously accompany them ; but gradually maternal enthusiasm relaxed, and it was not long before girls were allowed to go more or less where they liked, unchaperoned. There are still mothers, like Lady Howe and Lady Wimborne, who forbid their daughters to go to certain restaurants, but they are the exceptions. Palpably it was no good standing in the way of the modern girl's desire for independence and equality with men.

Sir Ellis Hume-Williams, in a divorce case in 1925, remarked that " nothing could be deduced, in these days, from the fact that a young married woman dined alone with a bachelor at his flat and perhaps had a glass of whisky before leaving."

" You have," he said, " a great deal creeping into this country from the United States and other countries. You have the frank companionship of men and women which does not in the least tend to immorality. The chaperone is almost extinct and is now classed with the Dodo."

He referred primarily to the married woman, but today it is equally true of the unmarried girl, save that one glass of whisky would hardly suffice her.

The modern girl of the 'twenties did not take long to show that she was capable of looking after

herself. Her independence and decision were of a quality unknown among men. When she made up her mind to do something she was determined indeed. Among the young, the 'twenties produced relatively few men of action. But it produced women of action by the score. It was a sign of the times that when women took to aviation it should arouse none of the surprise and horror which arose when a previous female generation took to bicycling ! Women and men share equally the record of aerial achievement in modern times.

In minor fields women quickly established their independence. It was a short step to flats and cars of their own, when once freedom from chaperonage had been achieved. The "sports girl" was evolved, who played all games on an equal basis with men. Women's clubs became a feature of social life, and soon the convention that man should entertain, and pay for, woman had disappeared. The modern girl would pay her share, and even entertain her friends on her own if she so wished. Moreover she showed that she could swallow quite as much alcohol as a man without turning a hair ; and this, more than anything, was an achievement of bi-sexualism !

Freedom of speech came with freedom of action. The phrase, "Ladies Present," ceased to have any meaning. Débutantes would discuss sex matters with more frankness than experience. Soon there was hardly a topic on which reticence between the sexes was deemed necessary.

In fact, the old-fashioned type of woman had been killed and buried. There would no longer be such creatures as "old maids." "Bachelor girls" was the phrase for the single women, and they knew how

to make the most of their bachelorhood, now that to be unmarried and thirty was no longer a stigma. Phrases about the "weaker" sex were meaningless ; the sexes were equal.

But what, meanwhile, of the men ?

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE

The post-war young man—A hybrid generation—Dilettantism—
From treasure hunts to freak parties—Decline and fall.

THE problem of the post-war girl was far simpler than that of the post-war young man. Its solution, perhaps, was as hard, but its nature was well defined. The modern girl had a straight course to pursue and went right ahead with it. She knew what she wanted. The War had given her a taste for independence, and now that woman was a surplus quantity sexual and financial freedom had become for her imperative. In its later stage the problem became more complex—when she discovered to her dismay that she was still, after all, a primitive woman, that she did not want all that amount of freedom, that equality of the sexes was an illusion and womanliness an asset. But in the first instance the essentials of her problem were perfectly clear.

The modern girl had, on the whole, benefited by the War. Not so the modern young man. His whole situation had been undermined, and he could see no straight course ahead of him.

He was from the outset at a disadvantage, for a still hysterical public was bound *a priori* to contrast him unfavourably with his counterpart of 1914. The very fact of his being alive was against him, for he was

thus prevented from starting level with the "boys who had died." Moreover he was a sensitive product, disinclined at first to gainsay his critics; and when he did so liable, like all who strive to overcome their sensitiveness, to fly to extremes of argument and conduct. An inferiority complex often looks like superiority to the world, and the post-war young man had it without question. The very words were an invention of the period.

He could be forgiven a certain scepticism regarding the brilliance of the pre-war young man. Memoirs and letters flooded the market—memoirs which gave the impression that British manhood had opened out into a flawless efflorescence in the millennium of 1914, only to be struck down in the perfect fulfilment of its being. But was this in fact the case? Were the mothers of the 'eighties and early 'nineties by some curious feat of gestation delivered of a litter of prodigies? One sometimes wonders whether those young men were not fore-ordained to die: to reach the summit of their powers in early youth only to be sacrificed to the love of the gods; and whether, had they lived, their careers would not have provided an anti-climax. In fact many had had opportunity to fulfil their early promise before the War cut them off, and of those who were in their 'thirties when War broke out, it is not recorded that many had yet made a very definite impression on the great world. Dare one suggest that charm was their principal asset, and that often it covered a multitude of imperfections?

They began life well endowed, cradled in material security. All the advantages (and disadvantages) of wealth and position were theirs. For the most part

they could still afford to remain impervious to the social revolution. They could lead the leisured life to which gentlemen were then accustomed—an extrovert life of hunting and polo and travelling and house-parties—and had supreme confidence (amounting sometimes to smugness) in the excellence and permanence of their world. Their gentlemen's education and the traditions of their upbringing fitted them to be war heroes *par excellence*; what else? War was the logical fulfilment of all they stood for. One wonders if they would have faced economic disaster so gaily. War, in a sense, is the easiest sort of crisis to face, because of its concerted emotionalism, and because it is (or was in 1914) by tradition intrinsically noble. Financial crisis is a squalid thing by comparison and a reversal of economic security is the greater test of courage. One demands physical courage only, the other moral courage as well. But these romantic war heroes, with their incomes and their estates, their friends and their influential relatives securely behind them, were in no such danger. Doubtless they would have been equal to such a crisis; but they were born with silver spoons in their mouths. Hence their canonization does not accord with the strictest laws of sanctity. On the other hand the circumstance of their birth renders them the more romantic.

Let it be clear that I do not seek in any way to disparage their heroism; but merely to suggest that, on its account, people have come to invest them with superlative qualities which they may not have possessed.

Their position was undoubtedly an asset to their fame. But would it not in fact have proved their

misfortune ? Success and brilliance do not as a rule grow out of prosperity. More often they are lone products. These young men were limited by the security of their world. They had no inducement to question its standards. Morally they were often confined by priggishness and repression. One of them, in a letter, describes some scenery as " dumb-foundingly jolly." A phrase attributed to one of the post-war æsthetes was " swooningly lovely ! " There is little to choose between the two, save that the latter seems to indicate a freer sensibility. Intellectually they were steeped in the classics, and individuality was not their strongest point. One of their few survivors is Mr. Duff Cooper, who has won well-merited distinction as a politician and a biographer. But some would describe Mr. Cooper as too Blue to be true.

We have a very similar analogy at the present time ; for the " brilliant young men " of the 'thirties are principally sons of famous fathers. When Mr. Randolph Churchill came of age in 1932 his father gave a dinner-party for brilliant fathers and their brilliant sons. Lord Birkenhead, son of a famous Lord Chancellor, was one of the latter ; Mr. Quintin Hogg, with his father, Lord Hailsham, another Lord Chancellor, was a second ; Lord Dufferin, grandson of a viceroy of India, a third. Now if there were to be a war tomorrow and if Lord Birkenhead, Mr. Hogg, Lord Dufferin and Mr. Churchill were all to be killed, they would go down to history, like the young men who were killed between 1914 and 1918, as geniuses cut off in their prime. Yet it is very much open to question whether they would deserve that reputation. That has still to be proved, and none of them yet

has had time to prove it ; though, owing to the accidents and exigencies of modern life, each has achieved greater prominence than did the young men of 1914 before their death.

Lord Birkenhead is modest and sincere ; Mr. Hogg may profit from being less advertised than some of his contemporaries and from not " rushing " his career ; Lord Dufferin has brilliance and a power to grasp essentials ; Mr. Churchill has a flamboyant personality, the gift of the gab and a defiant confidence in his powers. Time alone will show the extent of their ability and brilliance. Possibly it is outstanding ; possibly their fathers and grandfathers are their most valuable quality. The latter possibility has been overlooked in connection with the War heroes of the aristocracy.

The young man of the 'twenties came to manhood in a world of utter insecurity. That he should be an introvert was understandable. He was an anomaly, an anachronism, since he had received the kind of education which pre-supposed security. His public-school had educated him to be a gentleman and a gentleman of leisure at that.

Now, not merely was there no leisure, but the whole fabric of ideas on which he had been brought up was tottering to the ground. He was a hybrid, hovering between two worlds and two systems.

Not only his school but his home environment was very much to blame. The mantle of Edwardian materialism descended from the fathers to the sons. Throughout the War years the schoolboy heard talk of nothing but the " good times " to come when it should all be over ; and " good times " implied, primarily, " a good time." It was to ice-cream

that he looked forward, and champagne and no more ration-cards ; that gay life of London and Paris, which his parents were never tired of recalling. " Back to pre-war fun," was the idea uppermost in his mind when the Armistice came and for long after. And who was responsible for his hedonistic attitude but his parents, for whom materialism was the gospel of life ?

Any seriousness of purpose which they might preach was so wreathed in patriotic sentiment as to be instantly discounted. To urge upon a young man that he be worthy of those paragons, his elder brothers, and avenge their blood was the surest way to turn him to a defiant frivolity. Besides, where was the sense in idealism, of what use were causes and ambition, why take life seriously when at any moment human nature was capable of plunging you into another bloodthirsty massacre ? The post-war young man could hardly be blamed for his cynicism.

Again, the young will always listen to their elder brothers—or skip a generation and consult their grandmothers—rather than heed their parents. The post-war young man had no elder brothers to guide him ; so the gulf between the generations widened to an extent that was never known before.

The older generation could not be blamed for failing to assimilate the new code of manners and morals. It was too far removed from all their preconceived beliefs. But often they behaved with unreasonable selfishness towards their children. The rich middle-class manufacturer, who was now uppermost in Society, wished to have his cake and eat it. Being a snob, it pleased his vanity to educate his sons to be gentlemen. The idea that he, who had

been born in a humble middle-class home, should have a son at Eton gratified him hugely. He liked to think that the product of his plebeian blood and wealth was mixing, at Oxford, with all the lords in the land. But that was as far as his snobbery went. As soon as he could boast about his Eton and Oxford son he was satisfied. What happened after that was a different story. Now the boy must work his own way up in the world. He must go into the business and start at the bottom. What was good enough for his father was good enough for him. (Eton and Oxford were the exception which proved the rule.) He preferred not to consider that the nature of his son's education hardly fitted him for such labour ; nor that possibly, in the course of his adolescence, he might have developed theories of life at variance with those of the business community.

The father who belonged to the old order—the country squire and the retired Army officer—was just as bad. Nothing, not even the threat of bankruptcy, would dissuade him from giving his son the education that his grandfathers had had before him ; but since the son could not now afford simply to succeed his father, and since the Army had become a rich man's profession, it was up to him to carve out a profitable career for himself, regardless of the qualifications or tastes engendered by his education.

Reinforced by many who had succeeded to responsibility before they were old enough to shoulder it, the post-war young men were a rebel army : rebelling both against parental tyranny and against the limited conception of life for which it stood ; but still without a constructive policy. Destruction had been in the air too long for them to be at once equal to

reconstruction. They were still dazed, and undecided what to believe, now that so much of what they had been taught to believe was meaningless. The constructive urge comes from single-mindedness ; but their minds were muddled. Planted in one soil, they found themselves of a sudden growing in another ; and so their growth was arrested. Too fastidious for the new world, their roots were yet no longer implanted in the old. They were intermediates, like the creatures in Barrie's Never-Never Land who did not quite know *what* they were.

Yet they were not a race of iconoclasts. Theirs was a double protest for individualism : against the conventional formalism of the old order and the material standardization which was threatened by the new : against Americanism quite as much as Edwardianism ; yet they had in them elements of both, and the intention to make the best of each world. They were snobs in so far as rank and fashion appealed to their æsthetic sense, but not in so far as it influenced their view of life. Here they differed from the Edwardians. They approved an exploitation of the senses only in so far as it avoided a deadening of the spirit by materialism. Here they differed from the children of the Ritz. They were, for the most part, artists. And here they differed from both.

Post-war Oxford produced young men of artistic sensibility but minor artistic talent. Of all its writers only two are likely to survive : Edward Sackville-West, the author of *Simpson*, as a genuinely creative artist ; Evelyn Waugh as a satirist of the period. (This excepts any who, though members of post-war Oxford, were really of the War generation.)

And to others who, though not of Oxford, are still in the young Oxford tradition, the same applies. For it was a generation of *dilettantes*, of charming, sympathetic amateurs who were interested in the arts in a general way, and among whom not a few were able to turn their interest to some creative and commercial account.

But the chief artistic product of the 'twenties, when all is said and done, was the fancy-dress party !

The Bright Young People have never been appraised at their true valuation. Too often they are judged by their later and viler manifestations as portrayed by Evelyn Waugh. *Vile Bodies* is a true satire, but it does not pretend to portray the Bright Young People in their palmy days ; and these early manifestations have not been given their due. The Press has always been antagonistic to the Bright Young People ; possibly because it sensed in them an element of moral unorthodoxy which was certainly there, and which ultimately obtained the upper hand. On the other hand the *Daily Express*, in an attack on "The Modern Girl's Brother" in 1925, in the course of which he was referred to as weary, anæmic, feminine, bloodless, "dolled up like a girl," "an exquisite without masculinity" and "resembling a silken-coated lapdog," took pains to qualify its epithets with the assurance that "it is not suggested that he is sexually depraved."

But it had always been a favourite gambit of the Press to pounce on any youthful unorthodoxy in manners. The "masher" and the "dandy" and the "knot" had all come in for their fair share of abuse before the War ; and they, like the Bright Young People of the 'twenties, were simply the

successors of the eighteenth-century beau and the "bucks" of the Regency.

Even in the nineteenth century, "freak" parties were not unknown, for Fanny Kemble records that "fine ladies are amusing themselves with giving parties at which they and their guests take chloroform as a pastime." Lady Castlereagh, she says, started the fashion!

Chloroform parties apart, the amusements of young people since the War are far more controlled than they were in the past. This is probably because women now participate in them so freely and put a brake on behaviour. In the nineteenth century, when night life was confined to men, in the company of ladies of the town, London was a profligate and drunken city. Supper houses and dancing places, like the Piccadilly, Jessops, or the Argyll, would be open all night, and young men about town were carried to bed with the dawn. Public executions lasted as late as 1868, and it was a favourite habit to make up an all-night "hanging-party." The gambling was terrific; the nobility gambled away its estates right and left. Today, though there are a few young men who make a living out of bridge at their clubs, gambling is more or less confined to the continental resorts at certain seasons of the year; and even there it has been largely supplanted by bathing and various sports. When I was at Oxford two young men kept a roulette bank, and were very pleased with a profit of £250 each in one term. One night a young man (whose stepfather was a Cabinet Minister), having exhausted his credit with the bank, attempted to stake a horse on a number; but the banker (whose father is a Cabinet Minister) calmly

ruled that gentlemen were not permitted to stake in kind, unless they paraded the object in question before the bankers ; besides which, they were not prepared to pay him thirty-five horses if the number turned up. We considered ourselves very dashing, though the limit was only one pound. Our grandfathers would have staked a whole stable of hunters and lost it without turning a hair !

Even in private society intemperance prevailed in the nineteenth century to an extent that would horrify us today. Lord John Russell recounted how " When the ladies left the dining-room fresh bottles of port would be brought in, the host would arise and lock the door, and almost every man drank till he was under the table. With the exception of one or two men who kept sober, they never joined the ladies again. . . . It was a regular custom for the valets to come in, carry out their masters, put them in their coaches and escort them home. . . . Some of the valets were not themselves too sober . . . and some of the masters were put into the wrong carriages and carried to the wrong houses about midnight or later."

" Women," he adds, " used to escape by drawing-room windows after dinner and make their way to their bedrooms by the side door and back stairs rather than risk an encounter with drunken gentlemen in the hall."

Right up till the War, in the days of the Empire promenade, young men used to behave drunkenly in public. Whereas today you hold up your hands in horror at the Police Court tale of some lordling's tipsy music-hall brawl after a wedding-party, you will read of a brawl in Rotten Row over a famous beauty between two young " bloods " of the 'eighties, with

a sigh for the romantic days which are gone. Extremes of behaviour in the past take on a romantic flavour, but in the present they arouse nothing but distaste.

Wherefore let us regard the Bright Young People with an impartial eye ; for their various parties and exploits showed personality if nothing else. They were a sort of public demonstration against the dulness of social life as exemplified still by the conventional entertainments of the dowagers, and, with increasing force, by the (equally conventional) cult of the smart dance restaurant.

They started in a very modest way, as such movements always do. Lady Eleanor Smith and the Jungman sisters (daughters of Mrs. Richard Guinness) were the Bright Young People, unconsciously, long before the phrase was coined. They used to dress up and play ingenious hoaxes. Lady Eleanor, for some considerable time, masqueraded as a Russian Princess, and completely deceived a young man with a series of tales of her adventures. When the young man became suspicious and accused her over the telephone she appeared at a dance at which he was present, and when he saw the guests bowing and curtsying he was overcome with confusion. In shame that he could have doubted her, he bowed low over her hand. She ripped off her wig . . .

The same group started the treasure hunts which brought into being the Bright Young People as a Press feature in 1924 (Wembley year). "CHASING CLUES," said the *Daily Mail*. "NEW SOCIETY GAME."

MIDNIGHT CHASE IN LONDON

50 MOTOR CARS

THE BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE



The report which follows records the presence of an exalted personage,

“at the final meet of the ‘Society of Bright Young People’—that nebulous body which has inaugurated a series of hunts for hidden ‘treasure’ throughout the highways and byways of London by day and night. The ‘Society’ has grown from a few enthusiastic couples hunting for a prize of a few pounds to a movement which has captured all smart London and a prize proportionately greater, since every entrant must subscribe his or her half-sovereign to swell the pool.”

There follows an account of the “meet” at 2 a.m., and of those present: Gladys Cooper, Tallulah Bankhead and so forth. Then a graphic description of the hunt:

“... By this time slow cars had given place to high-powered ones, and slow wits to faster wits, so that the field, which has started some 50 cars strong, all closely packed, jostling and manœuvring for position, was straggled out, though still travelling well.

“Lovely coiffures and beautiful dresses deftly arranged were no longer in that form. Shingled heads scored heavily, for long hair was in many cases streaming in the breeze. Dressmakers should rejoice for the birth of the Bright Young People, for few of the frocks which went to Seven Dials yesterday morning will ever see the light of a ballroom again. A crawl on all fours in that none too clean neighbourhood . . . in search of an elusive clue chalked on the pavement, had soiled the majority beyond repair.

“The hunters found their final clue in Norfolk House, St. James’s, and here a splendid breakfast had been prepared and a string band to cheer them after their strenuous adventures.”¹

The Bright Young People, of course, were never a

¹ *Daily Mail*, July 26, 1924.

specific "Society," as the above report suggests, but simply what their name implied: a collection of people who were bright, young and—hitherto—innocuous.

But in time every ill-bred escapade of the younger generation came to be attributed to them. This was unjust. Though not explicitly a "Society," they were, nevertheless, a definite group of people, linked by a community of impulses. High-spirited they may have been, but they rarely did anything crude. It was not the Bright Young People, for instance, who sent out bogus invitations first to somebody's wedding and, later, to somebody's birthday party.

It *was* the Bright Young People who set the Thames on fire at Henley. But, until it happened, was not "setting the Thames on fire" regarded as the epitome of all that was most dashing and picturesque?

Some of the Bright Young People's hoaxes were amusing—quite as subtle as the practical jokes of those gay and glamorous Edwardians who used to steal racing-cups from neighbouring country houses.

Nearly always they made fun of people's social and intellectual pretensions. Once, while I was staying in a country house, a guest was introduced to some visitors who came over for tea as "Prince Michael of Serbia." He was, in fact, a young M.P.; one of the visitors had actually been at Eton with him, but suspected nothing. We all called him "Sir," and made way for him to enter or leave a room before us. (The latter habit, fortunately, came easily to him!)

After tea I played in a rubber of bridge with "the Prince" and two young ladies who were in such a

twitter of excitement that they had difficulty in concentrating on their cards. It was very odd bridge. The "Prince" used his royal prerogative to cheat so shamelessly and revoke so openly that I could hardly forbear from expostulating. That, however, would have been *lèse-majesté*. The young ladies were too confused to notice any irregularity. Later one of them was heard making conversation with His Royal Highness, who told a fantastic story of how, while driving his own car over the Serbian roads, he had a narrow escape from death through losing a wheel at 60 m.p.h.

"I had no chauffeur with me," he said, "because sometimes a Prince likes to escape from his subjects, you understand. I knew little of mechanics, but after a long struggle was able to put on a new wheel. When I got back to Belgrade I found that the wheel was hanging by a thread. It was a miracle that it had not flown off. For do you know what I had done? In my ignorance I had put that wheel on *upside down!*"

The young lady was aghast. "Oh, *sir*," she said, "what a terrible experience! And what sort of car was it?"

"A Hispano-Suiza."

"How lovely!" was her comment. "I always think Rolls-Royces are so slow, don't you?"

The hoax only leaked out some time later.

The "Bruno Hat" affair was a really good hoax: the best of all the Bright Young People's exploits. It emanated from the brain and brush of Mr. Brian Howard, who painted a number of absurd pictures in obvious parody of some of the more advanced French schools. They were framed in rope, and some

of them were on cork bath-mats. He gave them pretentious titles, like "Leda and the Swan," "Portrait of my Brother," "The Adoration of the Magi." But the pictures were nothing but a jumble of meaningless cubes and lines and symbols.

Then an invitation was sent out to a "First exhibition of pictures by Bruno Hat" in Mr. and Mrs. Bryan Guinness's house. It was accompanied by the following biography :

"Mr. Bruno Hat came to England with his father in 1919 from Lübeck. After having lived in this country a short time, Mr. Max Hat married an Englishwoman, and bought a general dealer's shop in Sussex, where he lived until he died in 1923. The shop is now managed by Mr. Bruno Hat with the help of his stepmother.

"Mr. Bruno Hat is now thirty-one years of age. Apart from some two months or so at a Hamburg art school, he is entirely self-taught. In frequent visits to London, exhibitions have provided him with little more than a glimpse of contemporary movements in painting. He has never, until now, exhibited a picture. A month ago, however, several examples of his work were taken to Paris, and the opinion there was so immediately favourable that successful arrangements have been made for an exhibition there in the early winter."

The exhibition was a complete success. A leaflet entitled "Approach to Hat" was distributed: a travesty of all the usual modern art jargon, signed "A. R. de T." A female with a price list and order book sat expectantly at a table. "Bruno Hat" himself sat in a wheeled chair. He wore smoked glasses, a drooping black moustache, and the sort of black clothes which a penniless German artist might easily wear if he had put on his "Sunday best" for the occasion. The intelligentsia of Mayfair

appeared in all their finery and made what they deemed to be appropriate comments in hushed tones. Some even tried out their German on Mr. Hat, who, it was explained, could speak no English. Few of them knew until the following day that their legs had been pulled.

This hoax was reminiscent of another which was played at Oxford soon after the War. A lecture by the well-known German psychologist, Dr. Emil Busch, was advertised on posters all over the town. A hall had been hired, and many distinguished professors and heads of colleges turned up to hear what the great thinker had to say. The lecture was a *tour de force*: a brilliant parody of all the jargon that psychologists use, but without one word of meaning. The professors were deeply impressed. They went away muttering that Dr. Busch had given them much interesting food for speculation. Little did they know that the famous Doctor was really an undergraduate, Mr. George Edinger.

Last year many of the selfsame professors, together with a number of world-famous pundits from London, attended a lecture at Oxford which promised epoch-making scientific disclosures. They listened to it with undivided attention. At the end they had the grace to admit to one another that they had hardly understood a word. When the lecturer asked for questions only one member of the audience rose: a young undergraduette, who proceeded to display in argument a complete mastery of the subject.

The lecturer was Einstein.

These two stories, however, have nothing to do with the Bright Young People.

It was their "freak" parties which next brought

them to the fore. Some of these were among the best Bohemian parties which London has ever seen. The best usually sprang from the imagination of artistic young men like Mr. David Tennant and Mr. Brian Howard. There was a Russian party, given by Countess Bosdari, for which an entire studio had been re-decorated for a single night to represent a Russian cabaret. There was the Mozart party in the Burlington Galleries, given by Mr. and Mrs. David Tennant, where all the guests wore eighteenth-century costume, and the playing of the "Jupiter" Symphony by a small orchestra was followed by dancing and a wonderful supper.

Others imitated the fancy-dress orgies. The "Circus Party" given to advertise a firm of dress-makers, the "Baby Party" of some febrile débutantes, and the "Wild West Party," with its collegiate facetiousness, were in a very different style. They lacked the imaginative spirit which animated the entertainments of Mr. Tennant, Mr. Howard and Co. ; for the Bright Young People made a genuine art of party-giving.

Yet from the outset their parties excited public disapproval. It must have been the expression "bottle-party" which shocked the public. "Bottle" is a word which suggests squalor. A bottle-party was simply a "Dutch" party, to which each guest was asked to contribute his portion of the drink. But somehow it evoked a picture of sprawling individuals drinking neat gin out of bottles ; and when David Tennant gave a "pyjama-and-bottle" party the picture of abandonment was complete. To drink from a bottle was sordid ; but to drink from a bottle *in pyjamas* was obscene ! The British public, which

would read with envious longing of Bohemian "orgies" in Chelsea studios before the War, bridled with distaste at the mention of the word bottle in conjunction with pyjamas. These Bright Young People, they said, were an unhealthy pest, which must be stamped out.

But the climax came with the "bottle-and-bath" party. For this Mr. Howard, Miss Elizabeth Ponsonby and some others hired the St. George's Baths at the height of a heat wave, so that their guests might swim in the intervals of dancing and supping. Surely a very reasonable idea? But the public did not think so. The public was thoroughly shocked.

"Great astonishment and not a little indignation," said the *Sunday Chronicle*, "is being expressed in London over the revelation that in the early hours of yesterday morning a large number of Society women danced in bathing dresses to the music of a negro band at a 'swim and dance' gathering organized by some of Mayfair's Bright Young People."

The principal objection of a "well-known Society hostess" was to the negro band. "It seems to me wholly wrong," she said, "to introduce a coloured element to a scene where white men and women, though they may be thoroughly enjoying themselves, are not appearing in the most dignified rôle."

It was of course no concern of a "well-known Society hostess," who had presumably but meagre Bohemian instincts. But where the Bright Young People as a whole were at fault was in courting publicity. It is true that they could hardly avoid it. But if at first they achieved publicity despite themselves, they soon came to welcome it. It made them significant, even important; it turned them into a

“movement.” What had once been a sub-conscious impulse became a self-conscious crusade. At the start the Bright Young People were genuine Bohemians because individualists. But the glamour of Bohemia is its mystery. Advertised, it takes on a distorted form and defeats its own ends ; organized, it is a contradiction in terms. Bright Young Bohemianism lost its spontaneity when it became a “stunt.” Besides, it was a mistake to suppose that you could ever impose Bohemian manners on a Society which had always been, and would always be, the most conventional in the world. For, though other races may appear more conventional on the surface, the English alone are utterly conventional at heart. Reading of these free-and-easy parties of the Bright Young People, they began to assume from Bohemian manners Bohemian morals. When they put the assumption into words the Bright Young People grew defiant. Their attitude, from being a plea for social and intellectual freedom, now appeared as an unabashed crusade for moral abnormality. And so the Bright Young People destroyed themselves, degenerating into a slough of dope and other excesses.

It was a pity. Their individualism, their imagination, their sympathy, their artistic sensibility, their genuine sense of life and its values had entitled them to some respect, in the face of a machine-made age. They infused the 'twenties with a spirit of romantic extravagance. The effect of their demise was a reaction towards conventional American-cum-cocktail-cum-orchid-cum-white-tie materialism, in which there lurks to this day—their only progeny—a strain of smart Bohemia.

CHAPTER IX

SOCIETY AND ART

Smart Bohemia—Artists in Mayfair—Taste comes into fashion—
Successful young men—Noel Coward and the “smartistic”—
Snobbery in architecture—The peerage on Epstein—What hope
for art ?

THE Bright Young People did not invent Bohemian parties. Even in London there was a Bohemian life before the War ; but it was quite separate from Society life. The artists lived in a world of their own.

Chelsea still connotes to the older generation the epitome of all that is abandoned in London life. An old gentleman recently asked me about a set of people who were having some unenviable publicity over a murder case.

“What sort of world do they belong to ?” he asked.

“Very much the underworld,” I replied.

The old gentleman at once had them taped. “I understand,” he said. “Chelsea.”

He would have been surprised to hear of the ultra-refinement of modern Chelsea ; still more so had I told him that the set in question belonged, if anywhere, to the fringes of Mayfair.

Chelsea used, before the War, to be a mysterious place, frequented chiefly by artists. Nobody quite knew what went on there, but it must all be very “wild and woolly !” In fact it was a district where

the artists lived for next to nothing, and where amusement was more spontaneous than anywhere in London today.

I have a friend called Hamish Paterson, who is a talented Scottish artist. Hamish has a beard, in the true artists' tradition, and singularly charming manners. He has only been in London four or five times since the War ; but before the War he used to know its artistic world intimately. Now, whenever he comes, he is blissfully regardless of change. He goes straight to Chelsea, to all the old pubs which he used to frequent, refusing to recognize that they are no longer as he knew them. He goes to Oddenino's and orders his absinthe like the artists used to do ; and the fact that Oddenino's is now a sort of mock-Tudor baronial kitchen escapes his attention. He asks me to luncheon in a pub off Holborn, where all the artists went in his day. But somehow one does not notice that it is now full only of bank-clerks ; for Hamish carries with him the flavour of that pre-war artists' world. He is a young man ; yet he is a relic of the old days before Mayfair invaded Chelsea, when artists were themselves and amused themselves in their own world.

After the War " Art " became fashionable. All the young people who had no particular vocations dubbed themselves artists. Some did not even trouble to do that, but merely announced to alarmed parents that they intended giving free rein to their artistic temperaments. The first step to this, of course, was to live in a studio. So the rent of studios went up until the true artists could no longer afford to live in them ; and Chelsea, once the happy-go-lucky haunt of the penniless, became slick and



MAYFAIR INTERIORS



presentable and rather *chic*. Smart women commandeered the studios for the sole purpose of giving parties and "going Bohemian." "Not artists at all but 'arty' people," was the description in a *Weekly Dispatch* article.

"They just talk about drawing and painting and their studios are only used for dressing up for parties and for dances—'do's' they call them.

"Since the arty people came to Chelsea all kinds of arty shops and arty restaurants have sprung up like mushrooms and much time is spent in visiting these places trying on arty hats, arty dresses and arty beads, and examining arty furnishings—especially arty cushions. No arty person's studio is properly furnished unless a few dozen of these arty cushions are strewn about the floor—bless you, no! not on chairs—no arty person has chairs."

And what happened to the poor and genuine artists? Most of them went abroad, where it was cheaper: first to Montparnasse, and then, when the arty invasion reached there, to places like Cassis and Cagnes, in the South of France; or else they settled down in the country in England. But others became absorbed as hangers-on to the smarty arty world.

So there is no longer an independent artistic world in London. Bloomsbury, the home of the intellectuals, is the nearest approach to it. But even Bloomsbury is apt to be parasitic, welcoming patronage from Mayfair.

At first sight it might seem to be an advantage, this leavening of the social world with the artistic. But it is nothing of the sort; in fact it is to the detriment of both. There is everything to be said for independent social worlds. Before the War a man was either in Society or he was not. If he was

not he did not bother his head, but set to work to create his own circle, which was infinitely happier and more valuable from being self-contained. But when social standards broke down the whole middle-class community became a potential member of Society, and these self-expressive worlds disappeared. Everybody began trying to be something which he was not, hankering after a world which he believed to be superior ; and artists with the rest.

Never, in the history of this country, have the arts been tarred with the social brush as they are today. The closest analogy is in the 'nineties. But the young men of the 'nineties horrified the average hostess as the Bright Young People of the 'twenties never did ; and ultimately the Wilde case warned Society against burning its fingers again with the artistic world.

In the eighteenth century the connection between Society and art was on a strict patronage basis. You might dole out money to painters, whose work you admired, but there was never any question of admitting them as your social equals. They lived in a world apart. A nobleman would no more have invited an artist to his dinner-party because he admired one of his pictures than he would today invite a plumber to dinner because he had installed an efficient drainage system in his flat. He did not regard the artist as an inferior being, but simply as a different being, to himself. He did, in fact, respect him, as few artists are respected today. His nineteenth century successors came definitely to regard the artist as someone inferior, and the twentieth-century process is a reaction against the latter rather than an extension of the former attitude. The

modern hostess has very little respect for art, of which she knows nothing, but likes to invite its exponents to her dinner-parties. Thus she is the direct reverse of her eighteenth-century forbear.

If only Mayfair would concern itself more with art and less with artists ; if she would read books rather than ask their authors to luncheon, there might be some value in this modern art snobbery. As it is, it does nothing but degrade the genuine artists and elevate the sham ones.

Could anything be more undignified than the way artists are "shown off" at smart parties as if they were curious botanical specimens? The idea of every hostess today is to "mix" her guests as much as possible. This does not mean mixing people who are suited but people who are unsuited to each other. These people are amused "at," not "by" parties, as at a kind of circus. Entertaining becomes a "stunt" to see how many incongruous people you can jumble up together in one room. The excuse is that "it takes all sorts to make a world," and it is always so interesting to meet clever people. But this is as far as it goes, for conversation, under such circumstances, is attuned to the lowest common denominator. The celebrities are not there to be intelligent ; just to be seen. A friend of mine, who has the reputation of being a "highbrow," once sat next to a prominent countess at luncheon. "I do find," was her astonishing remark, "that using the brain keeps one so young." Further comment is unnecessary.

There is hardly an author or artist who is not in some way damaged by this continuous contact with the frivolous world, and not a few are warped and

ruined altogether by the acquisition of Mayfair snobberies. The same applies to actors and actresses, many of whom, today, are so busy trying to be ladies and gentlemen that they have forgotten how to act.

Michelangelo was never a Society pet. He used to complain bitterly of the Pope's continual summonses to his court. "Painters," he said, "are not in any way unsociable through pride, but either because they find few pursuits equal to painting, or in order not to corrupt themselves with the useless conversation of idle people, and debase the intellect from the lofty imaginations in which they are always absorbed."

Those modern artists who spend so much of their time in Mayfair drawing-rooms might take his words to heart. But they cannot altogether be blamed. In the first instance Society appealed to their imagination as something romantic; so they went. Some have failed to see through the glamour. Lionization has proved too much for their vanity. But others continue through sheer necessity to cultivate Mayfair. Art has now become a business, like the selling of stocks and shares or jam or motor-cars; and, as I have mentioned, the business and the social world are inseparable. A great part of the selling is done over the luncheon table; hence an artist today cannot afford to neglect that luncheon table. Since Mayfair has all the rich people in her pocket, Mayfair connections are essential to him. Mayfair buys little on its merits. She buys a certain motor-car because that nice boy-friend of somebody's has just gone into the business. So she will always prefer to buy a picture from that good-looking young artist she met at so-and-so's than from some

perfect stranger she has never even seen. Artists who neglect Mayfair today—or whom Mayfair neglects—have a hard time to make ends meet ; and the same applies to architects.

A few years after the War there started a boom in house-decoration. It was here that Mayfair found her outlet for artistic expression.

In 1919 house-decoration was still in the stage of wistful, faded colourings. A woman's page of the period describes a "Lilac Drawing-room," with walls a soft, bluish grey ; above a low white picture-rail a frieze of faintly blurred sprays of lilac in their natural colours of white and mauve ; white wood-work and mantelpiece ; a fireplace with green tiles and a canopy and curb of polished steel ; a green carpet ; cretonne chair-covers patterned with lilac with faint touches of pink and blue entwined ; curtains of lilac-coloured silk ; and on the walls water-colours framed in dull silver. This sort of thing, together with sham Jacobean "cottagey" furniture, "jazz" cushions and "futurist" lamp-shades for the more daring, was typical of the decoration of the time.

And then the amateurs saw their chance and plunged into the decorating racket. Women of taste with a flair for antiques and business combined, young men of undefined artistic inclinations, set up in business to decorate the houses of their friends. "Taste" became fashionable. It meant "pickled" panelling and walnut furniture and Spanish ironwork and Italian odds-and-ends. All of it, of course, was "genuine" ; therefore expensive. The artistic young men and the businesslike woman began raking in comfortable incomes. Soon they

became adepts at "faking": at painting plaster to look like pickled oak and various hollow materials to look like marble and malachite. Nothing was what it seemed. People even preferred that it should not be, so that they could tap proudly on the panelling and say, "There now, you'd never tell it wasn't wood, would you?" Things reached such a pitch that one friend of mine actually had some wooden panelling painted to look like wood—it lacked sufficient knots and grain. One day she tapped it absent-mindedly and said, "Marvellous, isn't it? You'd never tell it wasn't wood."

It was essential that everything should be "in period." Thus the gramophone was disguised as a William and Mary commode, the lampshades were maps torn ruthlessly from eighteenth-century atlases, and a shelf of Milton's poems in an old binding, opened to disclose the telephone. Desmond MacCarthy in conversation once defined Bohemianism (though not in these actual words) as "the ability to view with equanimity the application of some object to a use for which it was never intended." Thus if you can use your bath-towel as a hearthrug and a fork to prop the window open, and if neither of these things grate on your sense of the appropriate, then you are a Bohemian. By the same token Mayfair's passion for disguising everything as something else may be the reverse side of the medal entitling her to the name of smart Bohemia!

When "modern" stuff came in—steel furniture and lots of coloured looking-glass and every sort of cute idea for a private cocktail bar—the amateur decorators reaped a real harvest. For the modern is cheap to produce but expensive to the purchaser.

Besides, modern decoration is essentially impermanent. You get so tired of it that it has to be renewed every few months.

This is not to say that all modern decorators lack intelligent ideas, nor that every house in Mayfair is as I have described. But "taste" is a social asset. Those who do not possess it buy it, that people may say, "She is so artistic. Look what lovely things she has in her house!"

Fitzgerald defined taste as the feminine of genius. Nowadays it is too often mistaken for genius itself. But this is an age of taste, not genius, in so far as it is an artistic age at all. I have described the post-war young men as a generation of *dilettantes*. But in this age the *dilettante* is actually at a greater advantage than the real artist. Never, I think, has there been a time when *dilettantism* could be turned to such profitable commercial account. The post-war young men may have been *dilettantes*; but they were not slow to realize their commercial possibilities as such. They can never be stigmatized as effete, because few have failed to translate their artistic gifts into cash and many have attained, at an early age, considerable financial prosperity. They have taken full advantage of the modern phenomenon by which taste is mistaken for genius.

I should like, if it does not appear patronizing, to instance three of my friends as successful young men of the 'twenties.

First Mr. Beverley Nichols. Mr. Nichols is in the early thirties, and makes a big income from considerable talents. Mr. Nichols's greatest assets are

his sense of humour and his modesty. He is a very charming companion. Mr. Nichols has an enviable capacity for hard work. He is a first-rate journalist, and has written a number of successful novels, including *Evensong* from which arose one of the best plays of 1932. Mr. Nichols spends a lot of money on his garden and prudently lays by the rest for the future.

Then Mr. Cecil Beaton. One respects Mr. Beaton's character, his commercial sense, and his artistic talent. He has a friendly nature, and perfect manners. Though not yet thirty he is making an income of several thousands a year from his photographs and his drawings. He is a talented photographer, but gets a better likeness with his pencil. He spends most of his money on entertaining his friends.

My third example is Mr. Oliver Messel. Mr. Messel comes of a prosperous City family from which he has inherited the faculty of success if not the taste for business. Mr. Messel makes a very comfortable income which could be much bigger if he were grasping by nature. But he has too kindly and unmercenary a disposition; besides, he does not need it. Mr. Messel has become, before the age of thirty, the leading stage-designer in England. He has invented, with skilful use of colour and materials, a new *genre* in stage decoration.

Now I have selected these three young men as typical products of the age. All three are talented, hard-working and successful. All three are bachelors. All three are amusing and socially popular. Mr. Nichols as something more than a journalist, Mr. Beaton as something more than a photographer, Mr. Messel as something more than a stage-designer are entitled to the respect due to all artists, and must



Scene for "Helen" by C

be congratulated on the position which they have each achieved. Moreover their success has not gone to their heads. All three are modest ; and the last claim which any of them would make is to greatness. Yet it is greatness which Society likes thrust upon them.

Mayfair has " taken up " the arts, but in much the same spirit as she might take up yo-yo or a new kind of pekingese. It implies little real literary or artistic discrimination on her part. Her patronage of art and her patronage of youth coincide. Old artists, old authors, brilliant old men do not interest them only the young. She has no respect for the maturity which is essential to the highest art.

This patronage is no doubt encouraging to young artists, but if exercised without a sense of true values it can only, in the long run, be detrimental to the arts as a whole. Its effect is to encourage the minor and parasitic arts at the expense of the true. For they are the easiest to appreciate. It is an age when journalism is of more account than literature, photography than painting, decoration than architecture, ballet and musical comedy than opera, drawing-room comedy than the drama ; when in fiction the subjective prevails over the objective and the inexperience of youth over the wisdom of age. This would be well enough—after all Mayfair has always been superficial in her interests—were it not for two circumstances. Firstly, Mayfair forms a far wider circle than ever she did in the past, for all who wish to be are its potential members. Secondly, she mistakes those minor accomplishments for major achievements, thus setting an artistic standard to which the whole wide circle subscribes. Since the aspirants to that

circle include men who are otherwise educated and discriminating, the result is a general debasement of æsthetic values. A purely Philistine Society is better than one which merely plays at the arts, without knowledge of the rules. It is better to be amused *at* Epstein than *by* Picasso. Half-knowledge kills all spontaneous judgment, and nothing could be more pernicious than the modern cult of the "amusing" in art.

From this has been evolved a *genre* best described as the "smartistic," of which Mr. Noel Coward is the high priest. Mr. Coward is young; but the transition today from a Brilliant Young Man to a Grand Old Man is a short one. Mr. Coward has become an oracle. In the judgment of Mayfair there is no question whatever but that Mr. Coward is the genius of the age. Of course he is nothing of the kind. Mr. Coward is a young man of remarkable talent; indeed, it is questionable whether any young man in the present century has exceeded his talent. But talent is very different from genius. Within the limitations of his own field, Mr. Coward has achieved a great deal; and since he is exceptionally versatile that field is wide. He is witty, he has a sense of tune, and, above all, an unrivalled sense of the theatre. He is a brilliant exponent of light, satirical comedy and (a shade less brilliant) of the modern musical entertainment. Within such limits Mr. Coward shows himself to be an artist. To call him a genius would be absurdly disproportionate.

Moreover, he is far less successful when he strays beyond the bounds of pure entertainment into what Mr. Robert Byron has called "his favourite guise of patriot, avenger and social aperient." Mr. Byron

refers to Mr. Coward's "Gandhi-like pity for the wrongs of the universe." "Each radiant creature," he says of *Words and Music*,¹ "on whom the eyes of the spectators were already feasting, was actually their VICTIM, in whose martyrdom they were assisting with a delicious sense of guilt and seat-well-paid-for."

If Mr. Coward is embarrassing as a moralist he is equally so as a "Poet Laureate." When serious he tends to hysteria. A woman whom I had previously regarded as normally intelligent remarked, on seeing *Cavalcade*, that it had given her "a new religion." If this be so Mr. Coward is a menace to English sanity of thought and emotion no less significant than Miss Aimée Semple MacPherson and other such Evangelists who have influenced America.

(It may be, of course, that Mr. Coward is the perfect Poet Laureate; for despite Lord Tennyson, that office was surely never intended for poets. Lord Rosslyn, in his autobiography, divulges that it was Queen Victoria's intention, had he lived, to designate his father Poet Laureate, from which it may be argued that the office was intended by her to become a perquisite of the House of Lords. In this case, either it should now be allowed to become hereditary, like the title of Earl Marshal, Hereditary Carver for Scotland, and so forth, or else Mr. Coward should at once be elevated to the peerage. But this is beside the point.)

Mr. Coward cannot altogether be blamed for persistently exceeding his vocation of entertainer. Nor can Mr. C. B. Cochran for aiding and abetting. Both are fine showmen, with a knowledge of what the public likes. But Mr. Coward's position is now so

¹ *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1932.

well established as the greatest artist of the century that he could afford to remain an artist, within the limitation of his talents, instead of trying to exploit public morality.

Pure entertainment, today, is despised as frivolous. People like to flatter themselves that, when they go to the theatre, they are improving their minds and expressing their artistic selves. The "smartistic" entertainment with its smattering of sermon here and ballet there is just serious enough, just highbrow enough, to satisfy their intellectual vanity; and at the same time it does not tax their resources too far. Mayfair's art snobs can go to a Coward revue with a clear conscience, which would only permit them to go to a music-hall in a spirit of tolerant hypersophistication. But the latter is in fact superior because less hybrid and less pretensions. By not pretending to art it preserves an artistic integrity.

The cult of the "smartistic" is a grave menace to the spread of fundamental cultural values and the education of public taste. It does not in any sense imply that we are becoming an artistic race. Far from it.

Even in the Victorian Era there was more to be said for public taste than there is today. It was bad, but it was definite. It was, in fact, taste. Grosvenor-place, for instance, as a specimen of architecture, is worthier of respect than Grosvenor House. The one is an explicit attempt to imitate the Italian Renaissance. The other is a miasma of nothingness, based on no definite idea but simply a jumble of vague ones. Victorian furniture, ugly as it was, expressed something: solidity, soundness, prosperity. The furniture which the man in the

street now buys by instalments expresses nothing. It is synthetic, not merely in its construction, but in its conception: a flimsy, mongrel offshoot of Jacobean, Classical and who knows what? Today we have learnt to appreciate a certain artistry and originality in Victorian knick-knacks. There is none of it in modern knick-knacks.

It is a tragedy that at this period, when the whole of England is being rebuilt, its building should be in the hands of men so preternaturally devoid of taste. In 1919, when we were starting to build on an extensive scale, an F.R.I.B.A. wrote to the *Daily Mail*, under the heading, "MAKING ENGLAND UGLY," to suggest that the new houses be erected outside and apart from the villages, so as not to deface them. His assumption was that anything modern must, *ipso facto*, be ugly; that in fact the two adjectives were synonymous; and that assumption is abundantly justified. It did not, apparently, occur to the F.R.I.B.A. in question that it was possible to create something that was modern, beautiful, and yet entirely different from the old; nor that no two buildings which are absolutely good in themselves, be they of quite different epochs, can ever be out of keeping one with the other. His attitude was one of complete resignation. It was, patently, impossible, that anything modern could ever be as beautiful as the old, unless indeed it copied it in every detail.

If only our town councillors and contractors and others responsible for the new England would disregard beauty altogether and consider, simply, utility! Out of that an unconscious beauty might grow. It would anyway be a definite attitude. But they pretend to beautify: to build nice, cosy little

houses with an old-world flavour, " warm red-brick dwellings with iron-framed windows, oak rain-water butts, and similar little trifles which please the eye of the artistic, and there are not a few such among the artisan and agricultural classes." (I quote from the prospectus of a post-war housing scheme.)

Oh yes, there are " not a few " artistic eyes in the " artisan and agricultural classes " ! They have a " smartistic " sense just as fully developed as their betters ! I take another example of the suburban idea of decoration from the account of a furnishing exhibition :

" Mrs. — is showing what inexpensive decoration can do. The walls and dome ceiling of her Gothic dining-room are made entirely of paper, but they represent the stone of an old monastery. In order that it would not look cold, the frieze is hand-painted to reproduce the red and blue and gold enamel of a twelfth-century design. The same colours are on the furniture. Beneath the frieze is stone carving copied in part from Durham Cathedral. The old monastic door which appears to be of solid oak in three-fold panels is also entirely of paper."

Could anything be more horrifying to contemplate ? In it you have, personified, the snobbery which infects our architecture as it infects so many other branches of English life.

Papers like the *Architectural Review*, with the active assistance of Mr. John Betjeman, strive manfully to educate the public away from this sort of pretentious sham and there is no doubt that ideas from Sweden and Germany are beginning slowly—very slowly—to filter through. But pretentiousness is still our watchword.

The fault lies less with the architects than with the people who commission the buildings. A distinguished architect recently designed for a London building society a block of flats which, without being too aggressively modern for the conservative Londoner, were on the simplest lines. In addition, he made provision for a swimming-bath in the courtyard.

The latter was instantly vetoed. Who had ever heard of a swimming-bath in connection with a block of London flats? No one. The answer was an insuperable argument against, not, as you might suppose, for, a swimming-bath. Well and good. Then, when they came to look at the plans for the building, the board of directors exclaimed in surprise, "Why, you've not given us a façade!" Thereupon they rejected the plans. "Most architects," they said, "will throw you in a façade for nothing." It is true. Many is the ill-built block of London flats whose internal planning has been sacrificed for some ponderous neo-classical façade. The façade is all that matters. Flats, in England, are called mansions. Very well, then, they must look like mansions. They must be imposing. An Englishman's home is his castle, and even if he lives in a flat it can look like a castle.

There is a story of an American who, on a European tour, promised his son anything he chose, with no price limit, for a wedding present. They visited the Petit Trianon at Versailles, which instantly took the son's fancy. He asked his father for a reproduction of the Petit Trianon in America—for himself and his wife to live in. The father was disappointed. The Petit Trianon was so small. Surely he would

prefer a reproduction of the Château de Versailles itself. But the son was determined.

The father kept his promise. In due course the completed building was presented with great ceremony to the son. It was a copy of the Petit Trianon, correct in every detail—but exactly four times the size.

A similar story concerns the American who visited Bramshill, a famous English Tudor home, built of red brick, and was so taken with it that he asked permission from its owner, Sir Anthony Cope, to reproduce it in America. Permission was given, together with access to the plans. About two years later the plans were returned, together with photographs of the completed house. It was a replica of Bramshill, all right—but in marble, not brick.

These stories make us laugh at America's expense. But should we not first set our own houses in order? For what are most of our new blocks but Georgian designs enlarged to four times their original size, and executed often in concrete, not brick?

With regard to commercial buildings the situation is even worse. English architects, when dealing with concrete, cannot escape from the heavy classical or Egyptian frontage. The new Regent Street is a crime; the new river front is tragedy piled upon tragedy. Each new building is worse than the last; and still they build.

The architectural critic of a daily paper, just after the War, naïvely praised the "straightforwardness of the style" of the new Port of London building. In it he found "a sign that our architects are striving to throw off the nightmare of a Germanic ideal awful in its ponderosity." What unconscious irony lies in those words today! It would be hard

to conceive of an erection more fantastically ponderous than that to which the critic refers. Meanwhile Germany has become the prime exponent of architecture in its simplest form . . . German ponderosity indeed ! We could do with a shade more Germanic influence among our architects today.

But our business men are as much to blame as our architects. Ponderosity is to their taste. In 1920 Sir Alfred Mond tried to force on the British public a national war memorial which the Press described as follows :

“ . . . from the bas-reliefs as they enter the arch of the pylon there fly upwards to the mighty lintel of the arch the disembodied spirits of the dead, pouring over the edge of the lintel 100 feet from the floor to the face of the pylon in immense cloudy forns, which in turn are surmounted by a great frieze on which a gigantic symbol of immortality is carved.”

Fortunately the Government had its wits sufficiently about it to spare us such an atrocity. But a few years later Sir Alfred (by then Lord Melchett) inflicted upon us in similar though fortunately somewhat modified taste, his Imperial Chemicals Building on Millbank, surmounted by a “ gigantic symbol ” of himself.

It is a tragedy that none of the artistic sense of the ancient aristocracy should animate these modern business noblemen. The two generations have built substantially on the same theory. The old nobleman built that his name might be perpetuated and his descendants enshrined in a palace which was moreover an enrichment of England's architectural heritage. So do Lord Melchett and his kind build, to enshrine in perpetuity the business which bears

their name. Lever House and Castle Howard are substantially the same; the one is simply the twentieth-century equivalent of the other. But Castle Howard happens to be a work of art, and Lever House is not. In the interval we have become a race devoid of artistic sensibility. The only exception is the Underground Company, whose main building is decorated with Epstein bas-reliefs, and whose new stations and other architectural details show intelligence and the hand of an artist.

The number of new rich men who patronize art in England is infinitesimally small. Lord Cowdray was one, Lord Iveagh was another, Lord Camrose is a third. The rest of the honours go to the Americans who bought so many of our art treasures after the War. The attitude towards art of the average rich Englishman is exemplified by the following cutting, relative to two Epstein bronzes which were withdrawn from the Liverpool Art Committee's autumn show of 1926 at the artist's request after the opening speech of Lord Wavertree :

“ ‘ There are two exhibits,’ said his Lordship, ‘ which I hope will bring large numbers to the Exhibition. I do not think they were accepted because of their artistic merit. Poor fellow ! I have no doubt Mr. Epstein has done his best, but, after all, even the poorest artist could have done better if he had submitted his worst ! ’

“ Lord Wavertree was formerly Colonel W. Hall Walker ; famous as an owner of racehorses and gentleman rider (*sic*). ”

It needs no comment.

It would seem that the peerage, in matters of art, were quite as unenlightened as the town councils for

which nudity in a painting implies immorality as a matter of course. At Preston, in 1927, there was a heated discussion as to whether a nude painted by Mr. G. Spencer Watson should be purchased for the town. One councillor, with unconscious humour, said he "would not like to think that his sister had sat for the picture," to which another replied that he would be proud if *his* sister had done so. An alderman expressed horror that at that time, "when all the leaders of religion were deploring the nation's loss of moral grit" it should be proposed to introduce a picture "of that type" into a public gallery. The mayor, on the other hand, said that a clergyman had congratulated him on the proposed purchase. "Then I am sorry for him," was the alderman's comment.

Another cutting which I have by me—"PRODIGY OF THE PEERAGE: EARL'S DAUGHTER AS POETESS"—naïvely remarks that Lady Diana Bridgeman "in spite (*sic*) of her artistic abilities is a very human girl."

But is the attitude of the layman to be wondered at when you consider that of the average Academy artist whom he accepts as his pundit in artistic matters? I once had the honour of interviewing for the Press the Hon. John Collier, the artist, who made to me the surprising statement that he was not "bothering about art!" "Art," said Honest John—or, beg his pardon, Honourable John—"is the faithful representation of nature." The "Honourable John" attitude is certainly that of the British public.

When Gene Tunney, the American boxer, first came to England, he aroused considerable astonishment, not unmingled with ridicule, because he was

accused of intellectual interests and even sought an interview with Mr. George Bernard Shaw. Mr. Harry Preston entertained Mr. Tunney at a dinner, when the latter said, in response to the drinking of his health :

“ I don't know why you make this fuss over me. What is boxing ? The ability to co-ordinate mind and muscle at a critical moment—that is all. Yet you receive me with all this acclaim. If I had been a great painter I would have been met by a couple of long-haired men and short-haired women. Had I been a famous litterateur my welcome would have been left to posterity.”

Mr. Tunney's estimate was not strictly accurate. Had he been a great painter he would have received no welcome from the public, it is true. On the other hand the experiences of Mr. Tunney the boxer, in the Albert Hall, would have been a holiday compared with the experiences of Mr. Tunney, the painter, in the halls of Mayfair. Hungry hostesses would have torn him limb from limb. Because of his painting ? No. Because of his fame as a painter.

Society could remedy public taste if, instead of pickling oak and young artists, she would get down to something fundamentally constructive in her artistic influence. For after all, the business heads and theatrical magnates who are largely responsible for our architecture and the furtherance of art, do constitute modern society. The commercialists are the aristocracy of today. The aristocracy of the eighteenth century safeguarded the arts in their time. It is the duty of the commercialists to do so now.

But what hope is there as long as Noel Coward remains a greater genius than Epstein in their eyes ?

CHAPTER X

STANDARDIZING TENDENCIES

Death of the "Old English Gentleman"—The Arnold tradition—
Reaction against its repressive morality—Happier family life—
But new material ritualism—The cult of *chic*.

INTELLECT, no less than artistic sensibility, inspires mistrust in the great bulk of the English people. Cleverness is a term of reproach reserved principally for foreigners. The "highbrow" is despised.

"As for the General
He disapproves of Art
And does not believe in it.
He has noticed
That Artists
Have an odd look in their eyes,
And a shifty expression.
In fact,
The General disapproves of Art."

So wrote Osbert Sitwell.

"Never trust a Man
Who plays the piano
The General says."

Thus it has been for the past hundred years.

But no longer. In the Middle Ages the Englishman's respect was for learning and for fighting; but the two were apart. There was the monk, who pursued knowledge, and the baron, who pursued battle. But after the Reformation the two coincided. The book and the sword, in the Elizabethan Age,

fell into the same hands, and so the English Gentleman was born. For four hundred years he lived inspired by the spirit of the Renaissance. Art was bound up with the soil, and the essential attribute of the aristocrat was culture. But with the birth of modern society, in the nineteenth century, the old English gentleman died. Respectability, not learning, became the Englishman's fetish. The middle classes, in striving to reproduce the English gentleman in themselves, destroyed him; for they disregarded that element of culture which was his essential foundation. They sought only to emulate what appeared on the surface: his wealth and his good manners. And thus the character of gentility was profoundly changed. .

Even the surviving protagonists of the old English gentleman have lost sight of his real nature, and emphasize his physical rather than his intellectual prowess, his code of honour rather than his culture. "TOO MUCH NAMBY PAMBY TODAY" challenges Sir Claude Champion de Crespigny in a Sunday newspaper. "Life," says he succinctly, "is not what it was. It is too modern."

"Gone are the chances for a gentleman to obtain satisfaction for an insult. Years ago a gentleman walked into a London club and said 'Gentlemen, duelling has been forbidden.' Someone answered him at once: 'Sir, then no small man's wife is safe.' It was true. . . . A woman's name is bandied about in the clubs and the defenders of her honour are few."

From which one might suppose that the old English gentleman was nothing but a blustering and bone-headed parrot. In fact, he was a sensitive and intelligent human being.

Those artistocrats who have today achieved artistic eminence—Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell, Edward and Vita Sackville-West, David Cecil—are exceptions to prove the new rule that the artistocrat should concern himself with riding, not writing. He who concerns himself with both is an almost extinct type. From which it is evident that the English gentleman is no more.

A few reversions to type survive. One example is Sir Herbert Maxwell. What modern English country gentleman would note in his diary the "salt turf spangled with pink centaury and thrift, golden birdsfoot trefoil and blue milkwort," as did Sir Herbert as a boy, after bathing? Sir Herbert, having been ploughed in his "Schools" at Oxford because he could not resist a hunt with the Heythrop the day before, set to work, on leaving the university, at the South Kensington Art School! By the new Englishman's code the ploughing in "Schools" would win Sir Herbert respect, but to follow it up by going to work in an art school would seem to him a phenomenon so at variance with the gentlemanly tradition as to be quite inexplicable. For except in Mayfair, where gentility does not matter, no artist is quite a gentleman. As for Sir Herbert's poetic phrase about the "salt spangled turf," it would rather shock him, as coming from one of his kind!

Language, in fact, formerly our pride and our boast, is now an extinct commodity. We have the richest language in the world, but we no longer use it. The English gentleman of Shakespeare now prides himself on being a "man of few words"; that is to say, a man of slang and no syntax. At its best

language today is impressionistic. Words are used so as to produce an instantaneous psychological reaction, to appeal direct to the senses instead of to the brain. Mr. James Joyce and the advertisement hoardings are at opposite ends of the same scale. But what poses as economy is often mere poverty of language.

Lord Ribblesdale, of whom Riversdale Grenfell wrote in a letter, "For five minutes he talks about Shakespeare, and for ten minutes about hunting," was another of the old type of aristocrat. A third was the late Lord Minto, who, before becoming Viceroy of India, had ridden three times in the Grand National and broken his neck [*sic*] steeplechasing. But, in politics as a whole, the type virtually died with Palmerston; and Palmerston belonged spiritually to the eighteenth century. What modern statesman could remark, as he did when his horse, Toxopholite, was beaten in the Derby, that he would rather have accepted the defeat of his Ministry? The late Lord Rosebery might have said it. Lord Grey of Fallodon might have preferred the loss of his Liberal leadership to that of a fine salmon. But they, again, are the exceptions.

Parliament is full of young "aristocrats" today, but, with the possible exception of Major Oliver Stanley and Mr. Duff Cooper, few of them will ever be more than back-benchers. They are, by nature, sportsmen rather than intellectuals and nowadays the one cancels out the other.

The sword and the book no longer go together. The new English gentleman stands by the sword alone: and even that is become a golf club. How has the change come about?

Dr. Arnold was its prime instrument. He conceived the formula by which the middle classes were to become gentlemen, and turned it into the public-school system. From the outset the avowed aim of the public schools was the development of character rather than intelligence. "An Englishman," said Bishop Creighton, "not only has no ideas; he hates an idea when he meets one." This might be taken as the motto of the English public school.

At school I learnt nothing, unless it be that I was rendered fit to black any man's boots. (For in fagging I cleaned a dozen or so pairs per day.) This omission, doubtless, was due partly to my own laziness. On the other hand, in an atmosphere of learning I might have acquired the will to learn. The atmosphere of Winchester (except in College) was primarily athletic. Athleticism is the primary instrument in the manufacture of character as the public schools conceive it. They aim at producing a fine, healthy animal. But is it not their function to produce fine, healthy men? No man can be healthy according to human standards unless his brain is developed as well as his body. Without intelligence he is at the mercy of animal reactions in a crisis. Hence, for example, the spate of mob hysteria on which we were borne into the Great War.

Parents, today, are as much to blame for this attitude as schoolmasters. Throughout a great part of the nineteenth century the process of intellectual debasement engendered by school life was largely discounted at home. Here a respect for knowledge did still prevail. The homes of the aristocracy, at least, possessed the heritage of fine libraries, and the Victorian poets and novelists were

revered figures. School education was merely a supplement to the culture which boys received at home. Even today, there are still English country houses, like Hatfield, where the territorial aristocracy has survived unadulterated and the cultural tradition persists. But they are the exception. For, by the 'sixties, when public-school reform began in earnest, all generations and either sex had had time to be infected with the public-school spirit. Now there is hardly a mother in England who would not sooner see her son excel at cricket than in intellectual attainments. "Fatally original" was a phrase used by Donald Hankey regarding a man whose intelligence he nevertheless recognized. "Fatally original" sums up the general attitude today towards a schoolboy with any sign of mental individualism. It is considered unhealthy for a boy to show undue interest in the affairs of the mind. On no account must you start "putting ideas into his head." It is bad for him to think too much. But it is never suggested that it is bad for him to play too much football.

To the average modern Lord Tennyson is not a poet but a cricketer. It may, indeed, be relevant to quote a remark once made to his present Lordship. "Lord Tennyson? Any relation to the guy who wrote *Hiawatha*?"

But Dr. Arnold was not concerned merely with the development of the body. The spirit concerned him intimately in his manufacture of the new English Gentleman; and here he interpreted Christian teaching to promulgate an important doctrine: repression.

Whatever else the old English gentleman may have

been, he was not repressed. He gave free rein to his impulses and his ideas, for he had perfect confidence in the rectitude of his instincts. He would say what he thought and do what he wished, and his inferiors respected him accordingly. He was an individualist.

But the new English gentleman dared not say what he thought, partly because he did not think, and partly because he was afraid of offending against a multitude of taboos. He would not do what he wished for fear that people would say he had transgressed against the canons of "good form." Compromise, never decisiveness, was his guiding principle. Parrot-phrases like "doing the right thing," "playing the game," "sticking to your guns," replaced in him freedom of thought and action. Our fathers will continue to "play the game" long after it is played out and a new game, with new rules, begun. They will stick to guns which have long since become obsolete. They will refuse to "let down" a man who is persistently letting *them* down. In short, the English gentleman ceased to be an individualist and became the (willing) victim of an organized system of conventions.

Dr. G. J. Renier, who, in *The English : Are They Human ?* has written an uncommonly shrewd analysis of our national character, christens this attitude the "ritualistic conception of life." In short, he decides that the Englishman, since the death of George IV, is not human. (On the other hand, he holds out sanguine hopes for the future.)

Here, then, we have the first great standardizing influence which goes so far to explain modern society. It provides the key to many phenomena. It accounts, more than does its mongrel nature, for

the fact that aristocracy is so ineffectual today. The public-school system pretends to produce gentlemen on the aristocratic pattern, but it destroys the essential quality of the aristocrat: individualism. Aristocracy has lost her gift for leadership, since that was a natural gift, and the ritualism to which she has now submitted is fundamentally opposed to nature. The public-school man's faculty for leadership is different from the old aristocrat's because it is based on an artificial conception of life. Instead of "born leaders of men" we have "made leaders of men."

Again, the lack of personal freedom in this country is due not to a specific band of Puritans, as is commonly suggested, but to the whole attitude towards life of the older generation, by which they create for themselves discipline and restraint on the assumption that anything they want to do must automatically be wrong. The reason we are not a free country is that we prefer not to be. Freedom would awaken our sense of guilt, which the public school code keeps well in check.

I speak in the present tense. But in fact there are signs that, in one respect at least, we are escaping from the shackles of this code. The public-school spirit has come in for violent criticism within the last ten years. The Englishman is still a ritualist; but as far as sex morality is concerned, he has the will to be an expressionist where before the War he was a repressionist. The great gain of the post-war epoch is in its greater moral latitude.

Edwardian Society had already begun to react against the rigid moral code of its fathers. Edwardian latitude, however, was so different in conception to

ours that the two generations shock each other profoundly. We cannot today accept the view of marriage which generally prevailed in their social world ; it is too cynical ; and fundamentally more immoral than our own, because of its hypocrisy. The broader-minded Edwardians held that marriage was the gateway to complete sexual freedom. They sanctioned any amount of infidelity, provided it was discreet. " Get married," they say to their daughters, " and then you can have as many affairs as you like. But not before." What we say is, " Don't marry in haste. Your first affair may not be lasting. Try out your young men, get to know them and the world before plunging into matrimony."

The Edwardians' attitude seems to us dishonest. Nor does it even fulfil its pretensions to outward respectability. It is natural that two young people should be " seen about " together if neither is married ; but, if one or other is married, surely it tends to bring discredit on the institution of marriage and creates a far graver impression of immorality in the public mind.

The broad-minded Edwardians, even such women as were regarded almost as social outcasts before the War, are horrified by our morality. This is because, even in their lapses, they were still moral ritualists, adhering to outward forms. We have discarded the ritual in the interests of greater frankness. We resemble them in that we may not pretend to complete marital fidelity ; but we do aspire to less marital deception.

In 1926 the Y.M.C.A. held a questionnaire as a result of which the youth of Great Britain agreed that the Sex Problem was its chief concern. This was

variously attributed to the revision of sex-standards since the War, the modern craze for sports and dancing, the general impulse to freedom at all costs, bad housing conditions, influence of the films and sex plays, inadequate sex instruction, weakened parental control, the enforced habit of later marriages due to financial stringency, and the exceptional surplus of women. Sex matters, it appeared, were now freely discussed between young men and women. "Girls," said one answer, "should be treated as pals, and as you would wish your own sister to be treated." Such symptoms of the general trend we have already observed.

Now it cannot be claimed that youth has yet arrived at a solution of the sex problem. But it can be claimed that she has avoided much of the marital unhappiness formerly caused by sex ignorance, and that, by eliminating prudery and sex-prejudice, she is one step nearer to a natural, as opposed to a ritualistic, conception of life. She is straightening out the distortions—moral, intellectual and spiritual—which the past hundred years engendered.

The previous generation points to the divorce court as evidence of the unhappiness caused by modern moral laxity. But it is probable that the Divorce Court today represents more happiness than did the silver wedding parties of our fathers. The reason why our fathers did not divorce was not that they were happier married but that their ritualism did not reconcile divorce with good form. They claim superiority for their marriages on the grounds of greater durability. But what of the unhappinesses, the frustrations, the deceptions, the insincerities, the distortions of outlook which that durability

concealed? There are probably as many couples among the Edwardians who wanted to divorce, but did not, as there are among the moderns who want to and do. Comparing the suppressed bitterness, the nervous irritability, the absence of sympathy which exist between so many married couples of our fathers' generation, with the freedom and understanding which exist between those of our own, we cannot but feel that, in discarding ritualistic sex conventions, we are nearer to a solution of the marriage problem.

We are, as yet, no freer from matrimonial mistakes than they. We have been mistaken, for instance, in supposing that marriage can be based on companionship and complete equality of the sexes. Except between very well-balanced individuals, a certain inequality is in its nature. But, after much experiment, we are beginning to discover these things, and it is very possible that divorce will materially decrease within the next twenty years. On the whole—though certain sections of Mayfair are an exception—we are acquiring a more permanent view of matrimony, uncynical, and based on a franker conception of its problems than before.

The principal charge against our morality is that it destroys home-life. This, in a sense, is true. Family ties are weakening. But this is due to other than moral causes, and in any case, there is room here for considerable relaxation. "For the sake of the children" is the argument commonly used against divorce. But is it not better that children should be free from any parental control than that they should be brought up in an atmosphere of matrimonial tension to which they cannot fail to be sensitive? The family atmosphere is apt to be an

artificial one at the best of times. How much more so when it is inharmonious !

Family tyranny has been the worst feature of personal life in the last hundred years.

“ I believe,” said Samuel Butler, “ that more unhappiness comes from this source than from any other—I mean from the attempt to prolong family connection unduly and to make people hang together artificially who would never naturally do so. The mischief among the lower classes is not so great, but among the middle and upper classes it is killing a large number daily. And the old people do not really like it much better than the young.”

Melchisedec, he said again, “ was a really happy man. He was without father, without mother, and without descent. He was an incarnate bachelor. He was a born orphan.”

Here is one source of repression and unhappiness which modern life is eliminating. I have already referred to the differences with his parents which burdened the post-war young man ; differences which arose chiefly from selfishness on the part of the parent and an over-indulgence in the possessive instinct. The next generation is likely to be free from such tyrannies. The modern mother is accused of neglecting her children to pursue her own devices. One might almost argue that the more she does this the better. The woman of previous generations was largely confined in her activities to family life. She had no opportunities to pursue interests—far less careers—or even friends of her own. Therefore she concentrated on her children ; and therefore, when the children grew up, they were apt to find her concentration irksome.

Family life today is far happier. Children, left more to themselves, grow up more independent and self-reliant, less subject to parental parrot-philosophy or parrot-reactions against it. Moreover, though not being expected, automatically, to be intimate with their parents, they tend ultimately to form a more intimate, because more natural, relationship with them. The young man of tomorrow is not likely to suffer from exaggerated familial demands and their consequent mutual resentments, but will find in his family a background the more vivid from its air of having been chosen by himself.

To this extent have inroads been made upon society's herd philosophy of the past hundred years: that we have thrown off the shackles of the old conventional morality in a protest for liberty and individualism. That is something gained. But of what use is moral latitude without depth of spirit and intellect? Intellectually and spiritually society is nearer to death than ever before. The reason is that on the social religion of Arnold has supervened another and more dangerous process of standardization.

If in the eighteenth century the Englishman respected culture and, in the nineteenth, respectability, the fetish of the twentieth is wealth. We have seen that the worship of mammon was well ingrained in the Edwardians. But, as yet, the all-pervading and deadening uniformity of its standards had not made itself felt. Wealth was still a means to an end—that end being the bolstering up of the old order. The Edwardians cultivated the *nouveaux riches* in order that they themselves might go on living as aristocrats; and the *nouveaux riches* adapted them-

selves to the standards of the aristocracy instead of imposing their own upon it. Americans, for instance, like the Duchess of Roxburghe and Lady Granard, instead of Americanizing England, became, as I have mentioned, more English than the English. The Edwardian Age is commonly regarded as a Golden Age ; for, though the spiritual ritualism of " good form " still prevailed, it had relaxed behind the scenes on the moral side, and the new material ritualism of wealth had not yet developed.

The general levelling up and levelling down of post-war Society, destroying once and for all the aristocratic principle, brought this new standard into being. It was cosmopolitan in its nature, and its gospel was the gospel of *chic*.

It is curious how the sense of this word has changed within the past few years. Once it implied originality, a departure from the general run. A *chic* woman was one who stood out above other women by her unusual personality and style. This implicit superiority allowed her to dispense with the ordinary fashion and evolve a line of her own. In this sense the *chic*-est woman in London would be somebody like Lady Wimborne, who is no slave to fashion, but wears her hair plastered down over the crown of her head and dresses in a highly individual and often startling manner.

But according to the modern sense of the word, *chic* is no longer the expression of your own personality in its own way. Rather must you mould your personality to the fashion of the day in the most successful manner possible. The *chic* woman is she who wears the clothes and the coiffure and the make-up of the moment, but wears them just a

shade better than anyone else. *Chic* is not an absolute and personal quality ; it is a general impersonal standard to which all may attain. All you have to do to be *chic* is to follow certain rules : dye your hair platinum blonde, or wear false eyelashes or messenger-boy hats or whatever it may be. At the most, the apotheosis of *chic* is the woman whose personality corresponds most effectively to that in vogue. Thus Lady Abdy is regarded as the *chic*-est woman in Paris because she is the Garbo type, and the Garbo type is fashionable.

Today it is the ambition of every woman to be *chic* in this sense, which is to say that every woman aspires to be the same as every other woman. The general effect happens to be pleasing, because the design of women's clothes at present is better than it has been for a long time. But this does not alter the fact that it is uniform.

It is nothing new that women should be slaves to fashion. But slavery to fashion today is not confined to women's clothes, nor even to the female sex. It is a psychological attitude which pervades every cranny of the mind and spirit. It is a philosophy of life, and as such the denial of personality. "As we all know," writes Lord Donegall, "it is now *chic* to have good manners." The remark may not have been made seriously, but the fact that it was made at all indicates a trend. Just as women become platinum blondes without any thought of whether blonde hair suits them better than that which God gave them, so it is implied that people have good manners, not because they like good manners, but because it happens, at the moment, to be the "right thing" to behave like a gentleman. Tomorrow it may be the

“ right thing ” to behave like a hooligan. There are no such rational principles behind this ritualism as underlay that of Dr. Arnold ; for Arnold was quite dogmatic as to the absolutism of right things and wrong things. But his training is presumably responsible for the unquestioning ease with which modern society accepts the capricious whims of *chic* without stopping to enquire why and wherefore !

However, the nature of these whims (which in fact concern good manners not at all) is fairly constant, and is explained by the identity of *chic* with the Spirit of Wealth.

You would imagine that if a rich man could afford one thing, it was independence. Most of us are hampered by poverty from living as we would like to live ; not so the rich. So do we, in our innocence, suppose. In the past, if a man were rich, he would spend his money according to his natural tastes. He would travel, or buy pictures, or hunt, or help the poor as the fancy took him. But it is no longer so. Wealth in his own eyes confers upon the rich man the privilege of following a certain standardized mode of life. He cannot live as he likes : he is in duty bound to live according to the popular conception of how a rich man should live ; and for a ruling on this he appeals to the goddess of *chic*. This is the “ slavery of wealth,” of which so much is written. In the past there was no slavery of wealth, because a man spent his money in his own favourite way. Similarly there are millionaires today who are happy because they use their money for purposes which they have at heart. But the majority are unhappy because they condemn themselves to a life of narrow, spiritless luxury which stifles every fibre of the soul.

Never have rich men lived more stupidly than they do today ; and since society is based on wealth, it follows that the life of Society has never been more stupid.

The life of the rich man provides the standard to which the average man aspires. Yet it is a life devoid of spiritual or intellectual values ; a herd-life in which the personal element counts for little and in which friendship is skin-deep ; a life such as frays the nerves, hardens the heart and ruins the digestion ; an *inhuman life*, over which the goddess *chic*, with her code of the " right thing " in the " right place " at the " right time " presides unrivalled, in triumphant negation of the axiom of free will.

CHAPTER XI

SNOBBERY OF WEALTH

Deadening of the spirit by money—Standardized homes—Luxury
v. comfort—A rootless Society—Craze for action—The Cos-
mopolitan abroad—Hollywood in Mayfair—Wealth without
responsibility.

THE post-war social levelling process involved a reversion to impersonality. Any society tends to conform to a type—the aristocratic and the democratic alike. But the ideal to which an aristocratic society pays tribute is that of individualism. Even when such a society has deteriorated, as it had in the Edwardian Age, its basic idea of the aristocrat as a distinct individual is implicit. If, therefore, when aristocratic society died in 1914 there died with it respect for personal qualities, modern society must, by its very nature, be far removed from reality.

Mechanical discoveries have removed it further. It is a distressing fact that man's advance should be in directly inverse ratio to that of his amenities. Man has more leisure today than he has ever had before ; yet he is less fitted than ever for its intelligent use. Machines could be made to enrich our lives ; but we prefer that they should impoverish them. The surplus energy which they save could be turned to our profit, but we squander it on their excessive and perverted exploitation. We make of

them an end in themselves. Matter which could be used for the liberation of mind, is in fact becoming the instrument of its annihilation. Material progress spells a deadening of the spirit.

The rich man—that is to say, the man who has the freest access to civilization's amenities—varies in character. To some the joy of making money overshadows that of spending it. To some it gives place to the joy of hoarding. Others see in their wealth a means to the comparative enrichment of the greater number. But we may presume that the first concern of the average rich man is the betterment of his standard of life and the wider enjoyment of his leisure.

Does he in fact better his standard of life?

A famous architect once built a large country house to the order of a Scottish millionaire. No expense was spared, and the house stands today a monument of palatial architecture. But it has never been inhabited. For the millionaire, accustomed all his life to a modest dwelling, was overawed by its magnificence. He could not imagine himself living happily in such a place. So he preserved it empty, as a kind of monument to his wealth, and occasionally, with modest pride, he takes his friends to see it.

In Yorkshire lives another millionaire in another large country house. Liveried footmen wait upon him and his guests at sumptuous meals. The best champagne is provided. But the host never touches it. Instead, he turns to a little table at his side, and pours himself out a large cup of strong tea, which he drinks throughout dinner. All his life long high tea has been his evening meal. Why, just because

he has grown rich, should he change this habit of a lifetime for an elaborate dinner? It's a wise millionaire that knows his own stomach . . .

These are moral tales with a substance of good sense; for the *cliché* that the rich are unhappy has a large substratum of truth. Neither of these men will submit to the altered conception of life laid down for the rich. They prefer to live as they, individually, choose. Thus they are probably happy.

Not so the average man of wealth. His aim—the aim, therefore, reflected by every aspirant to Society—is, firstly, to acquire the kind of home which smart people are accustomed to have. This, if it is not one of those Mayfair houses decorated according to the standardized “good taste” of a successful Society amateur, will be a luxury flat in some new block.

It is typical of our topsy-turvy notions that we should be erecting huge blocks of buildings to house the only people who can afford to live in London's existing houses, while those who cannot remain homeless. The standardization which flat-life implies is an economic necessity for the poor: an evil which results from modern overcrowding conditions. It is a convenience, also, for the impoverished members of the middle class. Yet, most quixotically, the *rich* have now come to regard this standardization as the epitome of luxury!

In foreign towns flats are built today chiefly for the poorer classes. I have stayed in a worker's flat in Berlin which was more comfortable than the quarters of a single worker in this country. If your income is such that you cannot afford the luxury of privacy a flat is ideal. But in London we do not

build flats for the poor ; we build them for the rich. One reason why London is so inadequately supplied with workers' tenements is that workers will not live in them. Unlike the rich, they will not be standardized. Despite the squalor, there are many who prefer the comparative privacy of their poky slum houses. So do the lower middle classes cling to the idea of their " own front door," be it only that of a semi-detached suburban villa. An Englishman's home, they say, is his castle. But for the rich Englishman his home today is his flat. Six only among a hundred identical windows in a luxury block are the rule for the more prosperous classes.

Yet the phrase " luxury flat " is a contradiction in terms. A flat has every disadvantage. It has little character of its own. It offers no privacy, since hundreds of others use the same door and the same staircase daily. It is usually confined to a single floor, and therefore deprived of the variety offered by the smallest house. A mansion flat lacks all personality ; nor have I ever seen one on which the owner succeeded in imposing his own to any appreciable degree. Too many concerted forces are against him.

Thus the one outlet for individualism left, the Englishman's home, is now, among the upper classes, being standardized out of existence. Flats apart, there is a sameness about the decoration and atmosphere of smart houses which even the mock-Tudor bungalow in a row of exact suburban replicas does not equal. The latter at least has " cosiness " ; it is a home, reflecting the tastes of its owner. The former is nothing but a miniature Ritz.

This all arises from a confusion between comfort

and luxury, for which, probably, the Americans are responsible. The flat and hotel habit came to us from across the Atlantic, where it arose from totally different conditions of planning and living. Lack of space made skyscrapers necessary in New York, while the New Yorker's lack of home sense adapted him easily to hotel and apartment life. Thus, originally there were some 90,000 first-class hotel bedrooms in New York to England's 5000. To England America has always stood for all that is latest and, therefore, best in the art of material comfort. So, despite the fact that the space problem was relatively inconsiderable, did the habit of communal life in luxury barracks spread over here to undermine the whole principle of our home life.

For in seeking luxury we lose comfort. There is one thing for which America has always secretly envied the English: an elusive, personal quality, an easy-mannered intimacy, a sense of peacefulness inseparable from the conception of the English gentleman. Hence, traditional English hospitality is different from any other hospitality. The reason of this is simple: it is that we understand—or understood—comfort.

Unaccountably this attribute is lacking today from our hotels, which in the "Merrie England" days, before the invention of railways, were famous for their hospitality. The few comfortable inns in England today—like Harry Preston's at Brighton, Norman Webb's at Chagford, John Fothergill's at Ascot—are good because of a personal quality which the others lack. Comfort is an essentially personal thing. It means taste. That is where it differs from luxury. The two could not be farther apart. Luxury

THE RICH



HOMES OF



can be fiendishly uncomfortable. Comfort is often quite unluxurious. Luxury means specific amenities, like central-heating, running-water, telephones in bedrooms, private baths, hordes of servants. You can have real comfort without any of those things. Comfort means willing and personal service, and a welcoming atmosphere; but it means nothing definable, for it is the atmosphere engendered by the host's personality. Psychology is the essence of comfort. Luxury is crude and lacking in psychology. Some people, though they may be lavish and hospitable by nature, lack the comfort sense altogether. The Americans lack it in themselves—America is a luxurious, not a comfortable country—though they are responsive to it in us.

But we too are beginning to lose it. Society today prefers machine-made luxury. It is a far cry from the cosy English firesides of yesterday to the arid, steam-heated houses of today. Instead of the open fire epitomizing comfort, you have the electric radiator, epitomizing luxury. In every detail the aim of the ideal home is an efficient impersonality.

Nothing illustrates our declining sense of comfort so vividly as the ousting of the railway by the motor-car. It is curious to read how the great Duke of Wellington, though he travelled occasionally by train, preferred to go down to Strathfieldsaye by road; for the clock has completed a circle and the same remark is true two generations later of the present Duke, his descendant. It looks as though the railway train may quite soon be an anachronism. Only recently I saw a film in which the arrival by train at the local station of some country-house guests struck a sharp note of incongruity. No

longer do hostesses write to you the times of the trains. They assume, unless you inform them to the contrary, that you will be arriving by car. There are countless people who never see an English railway station from one year's end to another, for they prefer to do even the longest journeys by road.

Yet, for comfort, there can be no comparison between the two. As far as I can see, the only argument in favour of a motor journey is that it takes you from door to door and that you are not disturbed by strangers. But this is outweighed by a thousand discomforts. You cannot move in a car, you cannot read. You are jostled about, your nerves are continually concentrated on the road, and you arrive at your destination cramped and exhausted. A train is superior in comfort to the most luxurious limousine.

But, of course, it is more *chic* to travel by car. That, not its superior comfort, is why people do it. A car is a luxury ; a train is not. A train is merely comfortable. To say, " I am motoring up to Scotland," sounds grander than " I am going up by the night express." Modern motors, too, overlook the essentials of comfort in the endeavour to pursue a standard line. They are inconveniently low on the road, their windows are so narrow as to admit only a limited view, and the touring car and landaulette, which alone enabled the motorist to enjoy at will both the air and the scenery, are things of the past. The nearest approach to the touring car today is the racing model, whose primary object is ostentation, not comfort at all.

(A minor instance of the sacrifice of the practical to the fashionable is the latest wrist-watch, which has no dial but merely slots, with figures indicating

the time. These watches are without rhyme or reason. They are very difficult indeed to tell the time by and æsthetically displeasing into the bargain.)

Comfort may seem a minor and purely physical consideration. But it is more significant. It stands for taste, good sense, simplicity and a homely disposition. The word "homely" in fashionable circles is a term of reproach. It conjures up visions of a vegetable existence; of strong women with shiny faces, brawny arms and an imagination confined by housewifery. This is no mere affectation, but symptomatic of a fundamental attitude towards the home as an institution. He who is homeless is rootless; he who is rootless is soulless. Modern smart society is both.

The slackening of family ties makes for individualism in the children. But the decay of the home instinct need and should not accompany it. Each man can make his own home, whose influence is indeed essential to his balance and general well-being. Today in Society he sets little store by it. It is more important to him to have a car, since this is smarter than a home and affords greater opportunities for display. He can, after all, sleep anywhere, and a home is only desirable for this one purpose. In the financial crisis hundreds sold their houses but kept their cars. The number of young people in Mayfair who possess expensive racing cars but live only in a couple of rooms which are no more than a dumping-ground for their belongings is considerable; while those who have homes use them, not to express their own personality, but as a convenient place for entertaining others.

As a rule they live in restaurants. We have

already noted this symbol of standardization, which symbolizes also the modern spirit of restlessness and gregariousness. Night after night the same people go out to the same restaurants, not to see each other but to be seen ; in the hectic fear of " missing something " if they keep away. There is no brotherhood in this gregariousness. It is a sort of primitive instinct for self-preservation which drives people into crowds. There is safety in numbers. Alone they are ill at ease and anxious, since, lacking roots, they lack the wherewithal to occupy their minds. Only a crowd gives them sufficient stimulus. Restaurant life is all very well as an occasional relaxation, but when it represents the everyday existence of an increasing number it can only forebode a stultification of the soul.

Moreover, the restaurants themselves are becoming more and more uniform—even in Paris. Here there used to be a hundred first-class restaurants, each very distinct from the other. Now the cosmopolitan influence is destroying their individual atmosphere. How much more so is it in London ? In the 'twenties there were half a dozen smart restaurants like the Café Anglais, Chez Victor, Taglioni—of a personal character. Now there is no perceptible difference between any of them. Monseigneur, Quaglino, the Café de Paris, the Embassy, Malmaison—to quote restaurants as opposed to hotels—are cut from precisely the same mould. Their bands, their decoration, their food, their cabarets are all interchangeable. Tastes other than those they exemplify are nowhere catered for. There is, for example, no smart restaurant in London, apart from grill rooms, where really good plain food can be obtained. All cater for

palates too jaded to taste anything but the richest sauces. English cooking, *at its best*, is as good as any in Europe. But the smart world, condemned to cosmopolitan food which lacks even the merit of being distinctly French, never tastes it at its best. Moreover, the restaurant world today is so completely in the hands of foreigners that there seems little prospect of our culinary reputation ever being redeemed. Recently a restaurant was opened in the West End which claimed to be entirely English in character. So it is. The food is of the best quality, simply cooked. But there is no draught beer. To run an all-English restaurant without draught beer is like running an Italian restaurant without spaghetti or a Russian restaurant without caviare. English bottled beer is probably, as a whole, the nastiest beer in existence. English draught beer is, of its kind, the best.

One could with enthusiasm forgive London restaurants for being un-English had they any individual character at all. But such exceptions as there are do not today meet with success. One of the oldest restaurants in London, and one of the best, is the Eiffel Tower. Here the cellar is famous, the food delicious, and Stulik, the proprietor, a unique personality. The atmosphere is intimate and restful. But today people do not want intimacy or repose ; they prefer a crowd and a noise, so the Eiffel has a struggle to keep going.

Few things, I suppose, have changed so much in recent years as our conception of pleasure. In the past men found their amusement principally in

looking at others doing things rather than in doing them themselves. Whether the spectacle which they liked to watch was in itself energetic, like the jousts of King Arthur's knights, or decoratively static, like the splendours of the Elizabethan Court, the essence of their pleasure was that of the *voyeur*.

But the days of waxworks and the kaleidoscope and the camera obscura are gone ; gone is the epoch of the great exhibitions, of the Crystal Palace and Earl's Court, when men were content to stand and wonder, open-eyed, at what was unfamiliar or fantastic, and learn ; gone is Vauxhall . . .

Our grandfathers favoured sedentary sports, like croquet and bowls. They had, and were, sluggish livers. Perched on preposterous and precarious wheels they bicycled sedately through the Park. Our fathers " strolled " there in the shade, chatting to acquaintances, leaning gracefully over the rail while they watched the riders in the Row.

But whoever heard of anyone going for a stroll in the Park today, except perhaps for the express purpose of exercising a dog ? " Church Parade " is no longer a feature of the London season. Walking, in fact, except as the incidental means of pursuing a grouse or a golf-ball—walking for its own sake, and for the sake of admiring the view, has ceased to be regarded as a pleasure at all. We no longer suffer from *sluggish* livers. Our ailments are of the nervous, galloping variety.

Every year the London season becomes more energetic. People must rush from one party or restaurant to another, to a third and fourth in the course of one evening, and finish up with an early morning bathing-party, transported at 60 m.p.h. to

the swimming-pools of Eton through the dawn. On the river, a languid evening in a punt is not enough. There must be dancing as well, at Datchet or at Bray, and a breakneck race down the Great West Road afterwards.

The next day there is no question of resting in preparation for the evening's exertions. Appointments all the morning, with hairdressers or commission agents or committees ; cocktails at the Ritz before lunch, luncheon parties ; tennis afterwards or golf at Swinley, or bridge ; charity rehearsal teas, then cocktail parties, a rush home to change for an early dinner and the theatre or ballet, after which the whole cycle begins all over again.

Once the week-ends were a rest from all this feverish activity ; but now they are more strenuous than the week itself—all its pleasures crammed together into a third of the time, with large, riotous, bright young house-parties, a dozen people motoring down for the day on Sunday, everyone rushing round the countryside in fast cars, and at night bridge and backgammon and truth games and practical jokes till all hours of the morning.

It is a curious fact that people who have nothing whatever to do are usually the busiest. The process of doing nothing would seem to be a whole-time job. It is easy enough, as a rule, to arrange an appointment with a professional man or woman ; but the "idle rich" are so full up with engagements that they do not know whether they're on their heads or their heels. One such woman once told me that she had been up since seven o'clock that morning, for an important appointment, and had been on her feet all day till she was quite worn out. I sympathized,

assuming pressure of legal business or something of the kind. But no. Her seven o'clock appointment had been with a fortune-teller, a Russian, who had told her the most wonderful things. She would have paid £500 for what he told her, for now she knew that she had been forcing her destiny and she must not force it further. The Russian had only been able to see her at 7 a.m. because he had appointments, presumably with other women who were forcing their destiny, at every hour of the day following.

Clothes, again, take up a prodigious amount of the smart woman's time. They become so expert in this lore that they can tell at a glance, on any woman they see, the difference between, say, a Vionnet and a Lanvin model and whether it is original or a copy. But they would never know the difference between a Titian and a Rembrandt, or whether that was original or a copy.

In this ceaseless round small fortunes are poured each year into the coffers of hairdressers, manicurists, and beauty doctors. Fashionable women spend £500 a year on their hairdressers—implying five or six hours a week. Ten million women have permanent waves every six months at an average cost of £3 and the aggregate sum of £60,000,000 yearly. It has been calculated indeed that the *average* English-woman spends £8 a year on her hair—all in the cause of fashionable uniformity.

This life of smart and futile activity is to be seen in its extremest form in the holiday resorts across the Channel. People misuse abominably the increased travelling facilities which science has given them. Instead of seeing more of the world than he did a hundred years ago, the wealthy man sees less. He

is transported across it in aeroplanes and Blue Trains, never stopping by the wayside, and looking neither above him, beneath him, to right nor to left. No longer does he travel in order to see places but in order to do things : jumping from Ritz to Ritz, from one place where you cannot gamble to another where you can, from a sea too cold for bathing to a sea that is warm enough, from a governess-ridden country to one where he can drink for twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four. Places themselves interest him only perfunctorily, apart from the things he can do in them ; hence all places strive to attract his custom by the introduction of cosmopolitan amusements. To travel at a leisurely pace through an unknown country as people used to travel before the *train de luxe* ensnared them ; to learn the language, talk to the natives, explore architectural beauties, would bore him to distraction. Europe today is, in a sense, a more, instead of a less, restricted place than it was, because in travelling it is so hard not to collide with the Cosmopolitan at play. The places where you can escape the Ritz influence become fewer and fewer each year.

Miss Margaret Whigham reflects the spirit in which the younger rich travel :¹

“ ‘ Margaret has gone mad ! ’ My friends really did not conceal their thoughts when I announced, last autumn, that I was going to Egypt. I mean they have always seen me round Bond Street, in and out of the Ritz, or at Ascot, and they considered the Embassy Club my spiritual home. It is in a way, for I love the gay life of the West End, Ascot, Cannes and all the other fun that comes the way of the modern young woman.

“ However, I had heard so much about Cairo’s gay

¹ *Daily Sketch*, March 14, 1932.

life that I bade a fond farewell to Jackson—that's the Embassy Club cat—and sallied forth into the big world.

"Now Egypt really does come up to expectations—but not from a Ritz-Carlton point of view. I found I had to abandon all that and appreciate it in the light of stepping back into the Bible. The natives are just heavenly in their colourful robes, and especially at Assouan; you almost expect to run into one of the minor prophets and be told off for wearing high heels and make-up.

"Cairo, you see, is only a pretty poor imitation of London, Paris and Cannes, and though I love that life I only love it at its best—I mean a night-club with bad lights, tawdry wallpaper and a dreary band is just agony. And that is Cairo: empty hotels trying to be pretentious, three-quarter modernized restaurants that just miss being what they seem to aim at—too depressing.

"Actually, the best thing in Cairo is the Ghezira Club, where they have polo, racing, tennis, golf, and everyone who is anyone goes there for tea."

Miss Whigham adds that

"we had to wear woollics in the evening. A lot of people had 'flu, and those that had not seemed to stagger about with 'hang-overs.' Really, there is nothing sillier than a 'hang-over' that has no *raison d'être* except just liverishness!

"No, for that sort of life, there is nothing like London—and next to London, not Paris or New York, but St. Moritz."

She finds the Pyramids back-breaking and their air foul, the natives "just are terribly devout," the dancing at Luxor is "no good at all" and the camels look just like all her friends. "You can't teach the beasts," she says. "They just haven't got one brain between them."

The intelligentsia are as bad offenders as the Philistines. There used, until a few years ago, to be a simple little village among the Austrian mountains called Salzburg. And then, one day (I quote the *Daily Express* of August 5, 1925), Salzburg's cardinal and about a hundred simple mountain priests suddenly found themselves sitting "among the international representatives of society, music and art."

"Signora Caruso, Mrs. Dressler, Lady Cunard, Miss Iris Tree and Miss Gladys Cooper attracted much attention from the simple Tyrolese who gathered round the street entrance, and shared honours with Mary Lewis, the American opera star, who wore a gorgeous ermine cloak lavishly trimmed with white fox such as had never before been seen in this picturesque Tyrolese town.

"Later men in evening dress and women with gleaming jewels and richly wrought cloaks stepped out from the holy precincts of the church-like theatre to the quaint cobbled roads of the Tyrolese town, whose gaping inhabitants stood wonderstruck. A fairyland opened its portals before their very eyes, emptying itself into their traditional workaday world.

"Indeed, Bond Street and Broadway seemed to have emptied themselves into the cobbled street of the picturesque mountain resort of Salzburg."

For Lady Diana Cooper was appearing in *The Miracle*.

The smart intelligentsia are a tough proposition. You cannot escape them as you can the Philistine by avoiding his haunts ; for they permeate everywhere. Visit this "picturesque Tyrolese town" today. It resembles a nightmare. The smart intelligentsia swarm there every August. Salzburg is a small

place. The hotel in the town is neither large nor efficient. The smart intelligentsia make of it a bear-garden. Fashionable women who pretend to an interest in music, accompanied by fashionable Guards officers who pretend to none, but sleep in the best seats throughout the operas, keep up an unceasing clamour in the lounge and in the streets of the town, making "scenes" about their tickets and muddles about their "dates." Even in the surrounding country you cannot escape them. Drove of them in six Rolls Royces will arrive to picnic in remote mountain villages and take possession of the entire Austrian landscape as if it were the Embassy Club. The average Englishman would be comparatively humbled by a place so historic as Salzburg. Not so the smart intelligentsia. For they know all about everything: about the churches and the *schlosses* and Strauss and German baroque art and the Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria; and they give vent to their knowledge in a loud and proprietary fashion which renders the place unendurable to the ordinary traveller.

Similarly they have ruined Venice. Their behaviour on the Lido is such that the repute of the English has visibly declined in Italian estimation.

Smart resorts like Cannes or Deauville are less objectionable because they do not pretend to beauty beyond that of uniform artificiality, nor to life beyond that of unenlightened hedonism. In fact they are sufficiently theatrical to be entertaining for a while. Here you find the incarnation of the cosmopolitan ideal: giant, impersonal hotels, casinos, cocktail bars, Paris shops; Nature harnessed to make artificial swimming-pools, smart cars skimming along

concrete promenades, speed-boats polluting the sea and making babel of the air ; stout, elderly women, underclothed alike, playing backgammon on yachts with their backs to the view ; elaborate picnics on rocks made civilized with concrete ; naked people browning themselves like roast potatoes ; a life of unceasing and energetic fatuity which has, nevertheless, in its unashamed animalism, some kind of integrity, and in its sophistication some kind of elegance.

But regarded as typical of the general life of what is now English smart society it can only be disquieting. In the South of France you see Society life in the round, as it were, and with the brake off. From the behaviour of Society here you can judge something of its fundamental character. Thus, if in the South of France people forget themselves and lose their manners and become unashamedly drunk and fight each other at parties and gamble away their money and reach the extremest stages of neuroticism you cannot contend that their behaviour is simply the effect of the unaccustomed sunshine. It is the unloosing of latent instincts in conformity with the principles of their ordinary life, and sheds proportionate light on those principles. Sound people are not so affected by the sun. It follows, therefore, that Society is not only restless but unsound.

We used, some years ago, to laugh at Hollywood's conception of London Society as portrayed on the screen : the overdressed vulgarity, the Ritz-like uniformity, the lavishness of orchids and diamonds, the dyed hair and maquillage and the extreme sophistication of the *débutantes*. But we can no longer in justice laugh at such representations, for

they are coming true. The organized ostentation of modern society takes the breath away. Society débutantes today, from the sub-débutante age, dress like smart married women. They plaster themselves in orchids and make-up, they dye their hair and varnish their nails, and compete feverishly for publicity like so many film stars. Their lives are led in the full glare of public curiosity, and their actions staged accordingly.

The following cutting might refer to a scene in a film; yet it is a typical social document of the present time:

"... they reached home together—the tall young earl who came of age a week ago, and his attractive dark-haired sweetheart who was one of the most beautiful débutantes last year—and stepped into the arms of a crowd of 'bright young things' and exquisite young men.

"Miss — was handed a great basket of dahlias still in their pots and six months out of season. Two young women in advanced Easter fashions cried 'My dear!' wildly.

"Lord —, twisting his grenadier moustache, looked correct and timid. There was a burst of excitement, a short spasm of talk and noise—and things became normal while photographs were taken.

"Miss — discarded the dahlias with the absent-minded touch of a film star and rotated before the cameras. Lord —'s eyes were hard and courageous.

" 'When are you going to be married?' shouted a young man with a bowler hat and an umbrella.

"The photographers had gone and the young lovers were retrieving the slightly battered basket of crimson flowers.

" 'I don't know,' said Miss —.

"The reception over, the young couple left—Miss —for her hotel, Lord — to his club—while the

exquisite young men raised their hats with the perfection of a musical comedy chorus, and the 'bright young things'—débutantes of yester-year—scattered off to cocktail parties."

A few years ago, had such a scene figured in a film, we should have laughed it away as an absurd travesty. Yet today it is fact. And perhaps, since Miss —— is half-American, we shall not be blamed for attributing the modern débutante "racket" to American influence. We have reason to be grateful to the Americans for many things—for cocktails, refrigerators, gangster films, slang, dance-music and the *New Yorker*; but not, I think, for this.

Another modern commentary comes from the pen of The Dragoon :

"Most of the débutantes I know act as their own publicity agents.

"This young lady being a blackleg, has gone one better, and the publicity agent that she (or her father) is employing is an efficient one.

"The entire British Press must know by this time that her foreign origin is not to be alluded to; that, since her father owns an estate, the territorial 'of' is to be appended to her name (as in Mackintosh of Mackintosh and Farquharson of Invercauld); and that, like many ambitious hostesses before her, she is taking the Charity Path to fame.

"I hope Miss —— of —— gets on. Anyone who can take 'society' so seriously deserves the best she can get."

A few years ago the manufacturers of face creams and such found it hard to persuade English society women to advertise their wares. Large sums were offered, but they would not be tempted. Now débutantes tumble over each other in competition

for this honour. One can sympathize with this attitude from a financial standpoint ; but it is inspired by more than money. She who is invited to advertise " Pond's " has a definite " score " over her less solicited contemporaries, and revels in the consequent publicity.

Every social event is regarded as an excuse for a further torrent of self-advertisement. Charity and its pageants are the easiest means. Weddings and christenings are " produced " on musical comedy lines. Photographers are courted in restaurants, at first-nights and at every private party. I say " private " party, but there is virtually no such thing. Parties are held in public. They are treated as public entertainments, welcoming the consequent Press notices and photographers. Of one we read : " Three hundred guests had been invited. Five hundred turned up. ' Be lenient with gate-crashers,' said Mrs. — to her staff." Such parties, when not held in public places, have all their impersonality. You could, indeed, go through a whole London season without taking away a clean-cut impression of a single hostess, a single *débutante*, or indeed a single individual of any description.

This is the racket which London Society has become, under the auspices of a Wealth+Youth combine ; for even those of its members who have neither wealth nor youth pretend to both as the common standard of life. Most of them have grown up in an atmosphere so padded with moneyed cosmopolitanism as to be incapable of conceiving of any other form of existence.

It is an old-fashioned doctrine that wealth confers responsibility. The modern plutocracy is no more

conscious of this than the modern aristocracy is sensitive to the obligations of a famous name. Society today is wholly irresponsible. Moreover, her method of spending money is unproductive not only to the community but to herself. One can sympathize, in view of present economic conditions, with her reluctance to spend it on tangible possessions which may only be a millstone round her neck. But possessions, to be permanent, need not be tangible. They can exist in the memory, in the enrichment of spiritual, emotional and intellectual experience. Modern Society has no memory, for none of her actions make upon her an impression deep enough to be worthy of remembrance. Besides, they are in themselves futile. The experience which Society buys today is physical, narrow, monotonous and without relation to the realities of existence. Thus her wealth is being squandered to no purpose whatever.

CHAPTER XII

SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY

Worship of success—Modern snobberies—Qualities of the harlot—
Hearts on the sleeve : cards on the table—The hard-boiled egg—
Society dehumanized—Plea for good manners and a new Christianity.

EVERY society, however uniform, has its scale of values. With modern society these cannot, by its nature, be human or absolute. Nevertheless there are in its hierarchy commodities which command greater respect than others among its members. If wealth and youth are its common standards, its highest is the quality of success. "Personalities" are of more account than personality, and a chart not of character but of achievement is the key to popularity in this dehumanized world. "If [a man] does not join the general scramble and pant with the money-making street, we deem him spiritless and lacking in ambition." William James would doubly reiterate that statement today.

Once individuals were considered smart ; now it is their doings. It is *chic* to go here, go there, play backgammon, skate. In Paris social figures like Proust's Duchesse de Guermantes were intrinsically *chic* because of what they were. Now they are *chic* because of what they do. A year or two ago, for instance, it became *très snob* to *jouer au golf*. And the Duchesse de Guermantes today, unless she played

golf—or at least midget golf—might forfeit her claim to smartness.

We have observed the craze for activity at any price, irrespective of its aims. These standards apply, too, in the great world where the eminence of a man is in direct proportion to the violence of his actions. The popular heroes today are not our poets and our saints and our philosophers but our speed-kings and our aviators—our record-breakers. Speed is given an intrinsic value. The faster you can do a thing the better you are said to do it. People like Sir Malcolm Campbell and the Mollisons may indeed further research in engineering and the development of aviation, but as Matthew Arnold said, when railway improvements were laying the original foundations of the speed fetish :

“ Your middle-class man thinks it the highest pitch of development and civilization when his letters are carried twelve times a day from Islington to Camberwell and from Camberwell to Islington, and if railway trains run between them every quarter of an hour. He thinks it is nothing that the trains only carry him from an illiberal, dismal life at Islington to an illiberal, dismal life at Camberwell ; and the letters only tell him that such is the life there.”

There is merit in the man of action ; but only in proportion to the merit of his action. But in the estimation of Society today action, and/or its outward trappings—noise and speed and “ bounce ” and self-assertiveness—alone spells success. In modern language the word “ bigger ” is synonymous with “ better.” Success, judged only by these crude standards, is a limited conception, in no way commensurate with character or ability or any of

those ingredients which should contribute to its make-up.

A "brilliant young man" said to me once: "The only way to succeed is to start at the top of the tree." To which the corollary may be, "Yes, and work downwards!" But today such an attitude does not necessarily imply a downward path. In modern times true merit does not automatically rise to the surface; it must be assisted by the impetus of self-confidence and self-advertisement or it may drown unrecognized. Thus self-confidence and self-advertisement alone may often succeed in their imposture of merit. The modern generation cannot be blamed for questioning the time-honoured relationship of reward to honest effort. Today it is all too possible for an able man to start at the bottom of the tree and get nowhere. Start then at the top. Aim for quick returns in a shifting world. Groundwork is superfluous—indeed, in such a world, a contradiction in terms.

Thus by modern standards the successful man is he who gets most publicity, and he who gets any publicity at all, be he only the author of a single novel, is more successful than he who gets none. After all, he has "done" something: his achievement chart is no longer blank.

If he has achieved his position under false pretences, it is the more to his credit. Society judges only by results; the means employed are unimportant. But she will always have a sneaking preference for the charlatan over the man who has "got there" by honest means. Anyone who is clever enough to be accepted by the world at his own valuation is worthy of respect, even though

that valuation be false. "Hats off" to him, she says, for "getting away with it" or "putting it across!" An element of admiration for the successful crook is no new product; but it is only in modern society the gangster or his social equivalent, has been openly received, admitted to the inner councils, proclaimed from its housetops, and there certified to the world O.K.!

Herein lies the danger of the success fetish. It is natural that the world should judge character by success. It can have no other means. Society, on the other hand, has other means, by which it is within her power and the scope of her duty to act as guardian of moral and intellectual standards on the people's behalf. Thus anyone whom she "receives" can with safety and justice be respected by the world, and anyone whom she does not admit is held to deserve the reputation thus incurred. In the past her standards of reception were doubtless too rigid. But today she has none at all. She deliberately lays her power aside and forgets her duty. Success alone concerns her; character not at all. What you do is all-important; not what you are. Thus, by Society's example, is engendered in the world a scale of utterly false and dangerous values.

For if success alone is the object of admiration that admiration must be irrespective not only of its means of achievement but of the branch of activity wherein it is achieved. It does not matter what you are successful at, provided only you are successful. We have already noted, in this connection, symptoms of stage snobbery, art snobbery, youth snobbery, wealth snobbery and speed snobbery, all of which were relatively unknown in the days when birth

snobbery prevailed. An amusing instance of the first was when the obscure débutante niece of a fashionable peeress obtained a minor part on the stage. At once her aunt, who had always, hitherto, haughtily neglected her, took a large party to see the play and afterwards, much to the girl's embarrassment, went round royally in jewels and orchids to see her in her dressing-room. When her ladyship had gone, the girl, who was particularly anxious to disguise her well-bred identity, was eagerly questioned as to her visitors by the other members of the company. "Oh, her!" exclaimed the girl. "She's just an old circus lady I used to know."

Another example of the overlapping of Mayfair and the stage was a conversation overheard between two young men in a club.

"What are you doing tonight?"

"I'm going to see Gladys Pearson's play."

An acuter form of stage snobbery is film snobbery, by which famous film stars, when they come to London, are fêted, regardless of their mentality or social qualities, by the noblest hostesses in the land. Sport snobbery has opened social doors to jockeys, horse-copers and prize-fighters, and professional tennis players. We may add sex snobbery, by which good looks alone, male or female, secure admission to the social world, and clothes snobbery, by which any woman who complies with extra success with the demands of *chic* is automatically stamped O.K.

Now it is not for a moment suggested that actresses, film stars, speed kings, millionaires, modistes, gigolos, professional boxers and all the rest who, on the strength of proficiency in their trade, today move freely in Society, are inferior

intellectually, morally or spiritually to their social superiors. Often the reverse is the case. On the other hand, many actors and actresses come to life only when on the stage, having little personality beyond that of the parts which they play. (Until the beginning of this century they never wanted to go into Society, because they knew their art would suffer. Now they simply let it suffer.) Similarly speed kings are liable to be at their best at the wheel, millionaires at the desk, boxers in the Ring rather than in social converse. But this is beside the point. For they are admitted, paradoxically, to a personal relationship on the strength of their professional, not their personal, reputations. The potential effects of this are obvious: that Society lends herself to unlimited financial, sexual and otherwise immoral exploitation by the less scrupulous members of those professions. Moreover, the loan, oftener than not, is a willing one. "Lordolatry" is still a popular failing, and the titled classes are perfectly prepared to get the best of two worlds by exploiting their titles for financial, sexual or otherwise immoral purposes. Thus Society has become one big commercial racket, and a shady one at that!

Her integrity is further impaired by the promiscuous honour in which she holds not only notabilities but notorieties: central figures in *causes célèbres*, and, particularly, successful harlots.

The notorious Lady Cardigan, who had lived more or less openly with her husband for years before she married him, and who was one of the more fantastic figures of her time, was consistently shunned by Society (except in her later years, when young men would accept her invitations out of curiosity and

because of her excellent shooting). Once, at a meet of the Beaufort Hunt at Badminton, she walked, unasked, into the dining-room where a Hunt breakfast was in progress. Immediately every lady left the room. On another cruel occasion she and Lord Cardigan organized a large ball at Deene Park, to which not a single soul came. (Perhaps she was the origin of that tragic rhyme :

Mrs. Smarty
Gave a Party
No one came.

Her brother
Gave another
Just the same.)

Today it is impossible that such things should occur. Lady Cardigan, possibly, would not be received by a number of modern hostesses. It is equally possible that, by her eccentricity, she might attain considerable social success and become the *chic* hostess of the moment. But it is quite certain that hardly a soul in Society would refuse, if asked, to go to her ball, if only to satisfy curiosity as to what this thrilling notoriety was really like. The titled classes today are so addicted to crowd life that they will accept the hospitality of almost anyone rich enough to entertain them. -

That certain moral standards should be relaxed is desirable. That a harlot should be accepted by Society in spite of her harlotry, and because of her wit, her personality or her heart of gold is understandable. But that she should be accepted *because* of her reputation as a harlot and for no other reason entitles the public to draw conclusions. (Her

importation into Society is, apart from anything else, superfluous.)

The public will, on the whole, be wrong in its assumption that all upper-class women are harlots ; for their instinctive morality is still sounder than that of many of their associates, and proof against much affectation of the harlot's manner. But it will not be far wrong in its consequent estimation of the qualities which Society admires and of the dangers implied by that admiration.

The Dragoman writes in 1932 :

“ Out of curiosity, I put the same question to two débutantes at a dance the other night. We had been discussing their crowded summer programme. ‘ What,’ I asked, ‘ is your ambition ? ’

“ The first gazed at me blankly with true débutante dumbness.

“ The other answered brightly, with equally true débutante brazenness. ‘ Oh,’ she said, ‘ I want to have the hell of a good time as quickly as possible and marry the richest man who turns up.’ ”

A certain débutante recently went into a nursing-home on pretence of a nervous breakdown. Her mother soon fished her out and told her not to be so foolish. She then proceeded to go about telling all her friends and acquaintances, “ in confidence,” that she had in fact been there as a maternity case. There was not an atom of truth in this statement, which was made simply that she might cut a dashing and notorious figure in front of her girl friends. Such dangerous lunacy must not be regarded as typical of the modern débutante, but the fact that today these creatures dress like demi-mondaines, cover themselves in orchids, make up their faces as thickly

(if not as carelessly) as ladies of the town, pray to be "talked about," and patently hope that the whole world will suspect them of a hundred affairs is not without its significance to the public mind.

The first quality which Society admires in the successful harlot is what she is pleased to call frankness. This may seem to contradict the social partiality for crooks ; but it does not, since the crook who admits to being a crook is regarded as a far more admirable figure than the crook who attempts to disguise the fact. Here Society is paying a quixotic tribute to mere foolishness. In the case of the harlot her tribute is to brazenness. If, in Society, you make no secret of what you do, what you do is condoned : whether your doings are in themselves reputable or not they are whitewashed the moment you confess to them. This is in direct contrast to the morality of the Edwardians for whom the only sin was that of being found out. It did not matter what you did, as long as you did not confess to it. Today secretiveness is held to be a species of hypocrisy. It does not occur to modern society that a quality called reticence is compatible with honesty. She does not seem to require a private life, a life within herself to fall back upon. She brazens her affairs from public confessionals and in so doing acquires the reputation of straightforwardness of character. Hence the admiration for the harlot who makes no secret of her trade or the source of her diamonds.

It is continually said, in justification of the woman who seeks publicity, that she "makes no pretence about it." If she admits, openly, that she desires advertisement, it is held to excuse that desire. The question of whether the desire is in itself a desirable

quality does not arise. Her disarming frankness rules it out of court. The attitude of modern society is, broadly, "How can we be vulgar if we admit that we are?" It is a dangerous and fallacious doctrine. Officially to declare the exhibition open does not excuse exhibitionism, to admit its hardness does not soften the heart, adultery is not cancelled out by public performance, many a man who confessed to robbery has found himself in gaol, nor is an animal, by boasting of its animal status, transformed into a man.

Our brazenness is held to be the expression of animal spirits. Animalism, again, is held to be a species of honesty, for it is direct, straightforward, without pretence. But so are the manners of gentlemen.

There is no subtlety in modern manners. Refinement is insipid. Everything is calculated to produce an instant, blaring effect. Wit, today, is wisecracks and repartee, the former appealing to the senses rather than the mind, the latter a weapon of the gutter. Outlines are crude, hearts are worn on the sleeve, all cards are on the table; there are no mysteries. Modesty is rare; for it is a form of weakness. Only by blowing your own trumpet can you "get anywhere." Selfishness prevails. Why prejudice your own worldly chances by consideration for others? Each man must fight for himself.

Modern frankness and self-confidence, in their right proportions, can be our most valuable quality. But perverted, carried to an excess, they are worse than hypocrisy and an inferiority complex. Just as it is with that other quality of the harlot which they both imply: sophistication, born of toughness.

The charm of the 'twenties as an epoch was that we were never yet quite hard-boiled. At the beginning of the decade our knowledge of the world was still limited, our sophistication incomplete. In 1919 "POOR LITTLE RICH GIRLS," as the title of a newspaper article, meant rich girls whose parents would not spend enough on their education ; facial surgery was still confined to the war wounded ; the newspapers could still say "there were fairies at Ascot yesterday," without raising so much as a guffaw ; and, as late as 1927, a caption under a photograph could refer to "Miss Fanny Ward, the beautiful young actress." As the hour-glass ran out the boiling proceeded, but still we remained soft in parts. Mr. Michael Arlen, in *The Green Hat*, gave us the first hard-boiled novel. Mr. James Douglas kindly helped to increase our sophistication with his exposures of alleged smut in literature. Mr. Frederick Lonsdale and Mr. Noel Coward did their bit of boiling to such effect that Sir Gerald du Maurier was constrained to ask the readers of a daily newspaper whether, in fact, we were in Hell, the Day of Judgment having arrived unnoticed. But the so-called "decadent" plays of the mid-'twenties seem harmless enough in the 'thirties. Today the egg is boiled quite hard—or so it is claimed ; for one can never be sure that it does not conceal a mushy yoke within a shell hard as porcelain. Today, to be hard-boiled is the one social essential. There was a time when appreciation of beauty was stigmatized as unmasculine. Now it is stigmatized as "un-hard-boiled." A complete experience of the world and imperviousness to all its ways is the premature claim, not only of the modern débutante, but of the school-

boy and even the child, precocious from his cradle.

A modern story is that of the four-year-old child to whom its mother was reading the tale of a fairy prince and princess, walking hand in hand through an enchanted wood. "They sat down," she read, "on a mossy bank——" "And then," the child forestalled her, "Sex reared its ugly head!" The modern generation knows all about everything—and how!

The modern generation is so "tough" that nothing can surprise or disconcert it. Its ideal is to appear at all costs proof against emotionalism. The very word *chic* has a metallic ring, and modern life revolves with all the inanimate precision of a machine.

This spirit is intelligible and, to a certain degree, admirable. In a chaotic and shifting world it does not do to be over-sensitive. Toughness, originally an acquired instrument of self-protection, is becoming the natural perquisite of the new generation. Physical toughness is one thing; intellectual toughness another. We could do with a bit more of the latter at the former's expense. But emotional toughness is a dangerous toy. It is well that we have freed ourselves from the sentimental slush in which our ancestors were accustomed to wallow. But the man who is insulated against shocks protects himself from shocks good and bad alike. By means of his anti-emotional serum he loses touch with life in its real form just as does the drug addict with his injection of morphia. He ceases to be sensitive to ordinary human values.

It is claimed by the modern generation that good manners are humbug, affectation and a waste of

time. But good manners are deeper than mere formality and politeness. You can have good manners without being polite, and the converse also is true. The French are a polite race ; but they are not a good-mannered race. French Society is shallow and little of its formality comes, as true good manners do, from sensibility. Good manners are in reality the reflection of the soul. They are the soul's self-expression, the window to a man's inner nature. He who lacks them lacks depth, humanity and finer feelings. He is a dullard and a person of limited horizon. When a man is in love, however crude his normal manners, he will often develop an unwonted tenderness and consideration for his fellows. This is more than the radiation of his happiness. It is that his soul is awakened. Similarly when he is unhappy his manners will often be gentle.

One of the few " Society women " who have good manners is Lady Louis Mountbatten. This is because she has a soul beyond Society life and which is occupied with profounder values. But Society as a body is soulless. Hence her brazenness, her toughness, her selfishness, her animalism. Hence her bad manners. Even when she loves it is often no more than lust, when she feels, it is but a nervous reaction. Her nature is opaque and unyielding, without subtlety, without sensibility.

We have observed how the nature of the gentleman has changed in modern times : how he has become a person without culture, without personality, without courage or convictions ; a person dependent on parrot conventions. But the change goes deeper than that. For he is no longer gentle ;

he is hardly even human. "He is the perfect saint," said Samuel Butler, "who is the perfect gentleman." How far from that conception is the English gentleman of today! How far from Thomas Dekker's

"Soft, meeke, patient, humble tranquill spirit;
The first true gentleman that ever breath'd!"

"Saint" in Society is a term of reproach, for its meaning has become distorted to imply repression and confinement within a narrow, priggish code; and even were a true saint to appear Society would regard him as a fool, who doesn't know what's good for him, or as a knave, pulling off a big double bluff. Altruism is a motive which is foreign to her, and which, therefore, she invariably misinterprets. For in a world where each man is for himself and the devil take the hindmost, nothing but mistrust of another's motives can prevail. As in the underworld of the East End so in the upper-world of the West End self-interest is attributed to all. The West End claims to have "seen through" human nature, finding goodness in no man. When a man does a straightforward thing it is assumed that he has some hidden and extra-clever motive. Moreover, it is very possible, considering the new standards which have invaded Society from beneath, that he has. Nobody trusts anybody in the Mayfair racket, any more than they do in the Chicago racket. Mayfair has lost her human instincts, so long has she been an artificial, impersonal world.

Society is like a nest of chrysales inhabiting a vacuum. Her antics recall those of a thousand ping-pong balls bouncing to nowhere. For, with all her talk about "getting there," where does she get to?

To Cannes, possibly, or Mrs. Corrigan's. Within herself, by the lights of the soul, she "gets" nowhere at all. The energies of the fast (*sic*) set, today so extensively imitated, can lead only to a "Brave New World" in whose inhabitants thought and sensibility no longer exist.

Yet there is an "object" in everything they do. Nothing arises from a spontaneous impulse. "What," Society will say, "is the object in being kind to So-and-so? He's all right, but one gets nothing in return." Softness, meekness, patience, humility, tranquillity are in themselves insufficient. Mayfair does not demand them. Their radiation from others gives her no spark of satisfaction. She herself has the converse qualities. She is hard, strident, arrogant and restless. Only in that dwindling part of the aristocracy which is outside Mayfair do they still survive. The courtesy of the aristocrat betrays a sensitive and sympathetic spirit which Mayfair entirely lacks. It is, besides, æsthetically pleasing, where his modern counterpart is harsh and unbeautiful. When the manners of the aristocrat are bad it is because he is over-sensitive and shy. One cannot ascribe such a source to the manners of Mayfair.

"Everybody of the middle rank who walks through this life with a sympathy for his companions on the same journey," wrote Thackeray, "must make no end of melancholy reflections upon the fate of those victims whom Society, that is, Snobbishness, is immolating every day. With love and simplicity and natural kindness Snobbishness is perpetually at war. People dare not be happy for fear of Snobs. People dare not love for fear of Snobs. People pine away lonely under the tyranny of Snobs. Honest kindly hearts dry up and

in the whole the Inner Classes



die. Gallant generous lads, blooming with hearty youth, swell into bloated old-bachelorhood, and burst and tumble over. Tender girls wither into shrunken decay, and perish solitary, from whom Snobbishness has cut off the common claim to happiness and affection with which nature has endowed us all."

That was ninety years ago ; but it is as true today, to such an extent has our standardized civilization spread into every corner of society, creating a greater variety of snobberies than Thackeray ever knew. With success as the utmost objective human qualities are eliminated. 'To be successful is more important than to be kind. An income of £2000 a year is of more account than sympathy. Prosperity ranks higher than courageous adversity. Thus is lost the faculty for judging anyone or anything at all by human measure. Even friendship is made to depend on impersonal rules of conduct. Man is seldom estimated as an individual, but each man according to the same fixed standard. Hence no true intimacy can exist. It is extraordinary how few people in Society today possess any psychological insight at all. They have little understanding of human nature, which may be the cause or effect of their mistrust of it. Yet without it they are unlikely to achieve even their own ambition of worldly success.

The extent to which they are removed from nature is illustrated by the alarming reluctance of the modern smart woman to have children. A young woman once exclaimed in horror when I confessed to a strong paternal instinct. It was to her as if I had admitted to a propensity for cocaine or to some other thoroughly unnatural perversion. I do not

believe so extreme an attitude to be typical. But in many Society women—and the number is increasing—their vanity and selfishness, their slavery to fashion, their lack of feeling are such as to pervert their natural faculties. They live in a world so muffled, so mechanical, so limited, so unadventurous, so lacking in perceptions, so divorced from life, as to have lost all human significance. They can no longer see what is true.

Such is the effect of the pursuit of wealth which animates the whole of Society today. Its extent is shown by the fact that, when the *Daily Express* held a competition in 1927 to decide who were "England's greatest men," every one of those chosen was a multi-millionaire. Is wealth the only modern measure of greatness?

"The desire to gain wealth and the fear to lose it," wrote William James, "are our chief breeders of cowardice and propagators of corruption. . . . A wealth-bound man must be a slave, whilst a man for whom poverty has no terrors becomes a freeman. Think of the strength which personal indifference to poverty would give us if we were devoted to unpopular causes. We need no longer hold our tongues or fear to vote the revolutionary or reformatory ticket. Our stocks might fall, our hopes of promotion vanish, our salaries stop, our club doors close in our faces; yet whilst we lived we would imperturbably bear witness to the spirit and our example would help to set free our generation . . . the prevalent fear of poverty among the educated classes is the worst moral disease from which our civilization suffers."

James spoke from a human, not a clerical point of view; but Society would never read him today. Most of the critics who have attempted to pierce

her defences have done so from the standpoint of religious morality, and therefore without success.

"If you go into the modern nursery," said Father Bernard Vaughan in 1920, "you find it full of golliwogs and quaint drawings. But how seldom do you see sacred pictures telling of God! I do not say that a nursery should be a church, but I do feel that one religious picture over the cot would be a profitable and wise variant. Remember how impressionable is the child mind."

This can hardly be classed as intelligent criticism of the modern age.

His "Sins of Society" sermons before the War were full of incisive censure. "The social world," he said, "is the embodiment of a lie, its principle of action is expediency; its measure of rightness is success." "Present-day smart people," he said again, "are so preoccupied with catering for their bodies that they quite forget their famishing souls." "[Society] still cares little, indeed, for what it cannot put on or into itself." "Nowadays it matters little what you are, but much, nay everything what you have. If you command money you command the world." With all this one is in cordial agreement today. But it is discounted by wholly disproportionate, even fanatical references to "this cursed Bridge which is like a millstone about Society's neck, dragging it down into the depths of this sewer of loathsome filthiness." That, of course, is merely silly. We know perfectly well that houses where contract is played are not normally "sewers of loathsome filthiness."

The Rector of All Saints, Margaret Street (the

Rev. H. F. B. Mackay), a similar critic of the period, held that

“modern conveniences are softening us all. They deprive us of half the daily discipline which used to teach men endurance and patience. And with the nerves of this soft age its speed is doing the work of the devil. Men and women all being shot half-conscious through a world of dissolving views, gathering their knowledge from the headlines of the newspapers. So habituated are we to noise and jar that we cannot tolerate stillness and repose, and our amusements become more and more violent.”

Every word of that one would willingly endorse. But the fact that it was spoken from a pulpit and subsequently published in the *Church Times* weakens its authority in an age which pays little respect to religion. A few sentences later Mr. Mackay cancels out its value in pointing luridly towards

“a marked increase in certain forms of vice, vice which is also crime, and that among the educated classes. Shops of a cynical shamelessness now flaunt themselves in the main thoroughfares untouched by the law—the education of the masses has brought evil fruit in a crop of gutter journals, which cater for the lowest tastes, and in an epidemic of cheap, impure literature . . .”

At this Society can only smile. She is not a sink of vice, and she knows it. But the narrowness of Church morality sees vice in the slightest relaxation of its code and in the first onslaught on its prejudices.

Post-war Society's lay critic, “the Gentleman with a Duster,” performed a greater service in directing himself against, not vice, but folly.

“Our curse,” he wrote, “is not original sin but aboriginal stupidity. It is human to err, inhuman to practise iniquity. We blunder rather than sin. Few

men set out to reach hell, but most of us are for ever losing our way to heaven. Folly, as an aberration, is laughable ; as a fashion, as a rule of life, it is disastrous."

"One of the charges to be brought against Fashion," he says again, "and it is by no means a light one, is the charge that it has depressed the human spirit and degraded the natural joy of the human heart."

And :

"On the great bulk of the English people it [modern Society] has a vulgarising effect—it makes them think highly of money and scornfully of culture, it makes them hot for self-indulgence and cold towards self-development, it makes them eager for parade, display, ostentation ; they have no inward life, they are 'nowhere greater strangers than at home,' their eyes are in the ends of the earth."

Nevertheless his whole jeremiad is permeated with an atmosphere of moral priggishness. His tone is that of the preacher. He is shocked by the slightest deviation from a rigidly conventional code of manners, seeing in it immorality. He is even shocked by Lady Oxford, who is, in fact, a woman of highly orthodox religion.

Dean Inge is an intelligent modern critic of Society ; but Society will not listen to him, because he is an ecclesiastic. What we need is vigorous criticism of Society from a lay angle. For this is not a religious age. The poet, in his definition of the gentleman, did not think of his qualities as Christian virtues. Yet Christian virtues in fact they were. Let us not think of them as Christian virtues either. Ecclesiasticism has done so much to distort the original conception of Christianity that the very mention of the word "Christian" in relation to some quality discredits it in modern eyes.

Yet true Christian principles form the one valid basis for life. To reduce it to its lowest terms, Christianity is the best policy ! Until Society accepts the Christian ideal even in disguise or by means of so cynical a formula as this, there is little hope for her inward future. But there is no need for disguise ; for the original Christian values were, in fact, no more than human values. The Church, in its present form, is a hindrance rather than a help to this process, which must come from below rather than from above, from within rather than from without, from conviction rather than teaching. The Church, it appears, cannot awaken the soul of modern society. Some other agency must be found to restore her to humanity.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE LOST COUNTRYSIDE

Country ties forsaken—Mockery of the week-end habit—Sport worship—Fear of solitude—Back to the soil !

THERE are three circumstances in this life for which I shall always be profoundly grateful : the first, for being wholly Scottish, born and bred ; the second, for a simple and economical upbringing, presupposing no wealth to come ; the third, for being taught to acquire from an early age (albeit often under protest) a deep love of the country. All these are good securities. The man who is born a Scot is like the motorist who is sure of his brakes : he can go as fast as he likes, safe in the knowledge that he can pull up within a yard. He who has been brought up not as a rich man can adapt himself with comparative ease to reversals of fortune and most discomforts, and preserves a certain sense of the realities. The lover of the country has a permanent foundation to his life, a never-failing source of real emotion, a refuge from every worldly vicissitude.

I remark upon these circumstances out of gratitude to my parents, and in no complacent spirit. I cannot claim to have used profitably the income from these securities. I have none of the Scot's determination and capacity for work, I have continually spent more money than I possessed, and I have lived the greater

part of my life in towns. But there always remains the feeling that they are there, in the background, as "cover" for my actions, to be drawn upon in case of need.

Only one of these securities can be bought in the open market. You cannot arrange for Scottish blood to be injected into your veins. If you have been brought up in luxury the damage is already done. There are thousands today suffering acutely from the necessity to change their standard of life. But a love of the country is a thing that every man can cultivate, and that Society should cultivate if she is to save herself.

The English are by nature a race of country-dwellers. Unlike France, the history of England is not in her capital, but in her countryside: the history of her feudal castles and broad acres, her landed noblemen and her yeomen and her peasants. Our aristocracy has always been a territorial one. It is true that many of the noblest families in this country sprang originally from wealthy merchant stock. But always these merchants purchased estates, and by the second generation their families had absorbed from the soil the character, the manners, and the qualities of the aristocrat.

Even in the nineteenth century, when the industrial revolution was well advanced, importance still attached to the possession of land. We have remarked the extent to which the enriched Victorian middle-class bought or created landed estates. They still continued to do so after the repeal of the Corn Laws had killed the landed influence. But it was in a different spirit; for social prestige, not political power. They never became attached to the soil as

their fathers had done, nor did they assume its true obligations. Industry was driving people more and more into the towns. "It is now the towns against the squires and the towns will win," said John Bright. His remark was intended in a political, but can equally be interpreted in a social, sense.

The development of railways was another nail in the coffin of country life, for it killed the social influence of the country town and drew people to London. Still, the social far outlived the political importance of land. Country house life was in its heyday throughout the Edwardian Era. Right up to the War the London season was confined to three months of the year, the remainder of which Society spent permanently in the country. For the land was still in the hands of feudal landlords.

They had had one or two knocks, notably the Finance Act of 1909, which so increased their taxation that the sale of estates became necessary for many. But after the War their situation grew acute. There was mentioned in the House of Commons one large agricultural estate which had a rent-roll of £42,496. Management and maintenance expenses amounted to £19,229, leaving a net income of £23,267. On this net income rates, taxes and statutory burdens amounted to £22,800, leaving to the owner only £467. This typical state of affairs, together with the increasing burden of death duties, precipitated a revolution, by which land changed hands quicker than it had ever done before. In its scope it was a revolution comparable to the dissolution of the monasteries. Land in 1919 fetched high prices, which accelerated the rush to sell. It passed from the big landowners into the hands of yeomen

farmers. The newspapers in 1919 hailed the change as an "historical romance," prophesying that henceforward "the people of England would own England," whereas hitherto thirty millions had owned no land at all. They could not foresee the present tragic agricultural depression! Where landowners did not sell their estates outright they disposed of outlying portions, and kept merely house and park; thus their direct connection with the soil was weakened. Others shut up their country houses altogether. A great number, representing, principally, the oldest aristocracy, held out. Some sold art treasures, which materially assisted their Budget. Lord Sackville, for instance, is enabled to live at Knole solely because he was able to sell a few pictures at the height of the art "boom." Some formed their estates into companies, a practice which has today become almost universal. But some were too conservative for this. The late Duke of Richmond was one who steadfastly refused to do anything of the kind, with the result that the present duke, whose revenue from his estates consists of fishing-rents, the profits of Goodwood Racecourse and little else, was forced to sell all the beautiful Goodwood beech woods for timber and to rail in what had been, from time immemorial, a free part of the racecourse. Lord Durham was doubly unfortunate, since his two predecessors in the title died within a year of one another, the two lots of death duties making it impossible for him to keep up Lambton Castle.

In fact, however, a great number of the old landowners do still contrive to live on their estates. The Duke of Rutland was opening up Haddon Hall

while most of his *confrères* were shutting up their homes, and Belvoir Castle is still kept up in lavish style. The majority of the dukes do still rule over their ancestral land, including their graces of Bedford, Portland, Marlborough, Westminster, Sutherland, Roxburghe and Buccleuch. The editors of Burke's *Landed Gentry* remark that the owners of estates dating back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have fought hard to retain them and have, in most cases, succeeded. But a very considerable proportion of the landed classes are dispossessed. From the list of landed people in this year's edition of the *Landed Gentry* nearly a thousand names are missing, though their inclusion in a separate part of the volume will testify to what used to be. Many of these are Victorian industrialists who bought large estates sixty years ago, but were forced to sell them after the War ; but the majority represent the old aristocracy.

The change has had profound effects on the nature of Society. Many landed people who still retain their estates are too poor to live as they did, and their story is a grim struggle for existence. The most praiseworthy have deserted London altogether, to keep up the name of aristocracy in the countryside. Of those who bought land after the War few acquired any roots in the soil, which they regarded purely as a money-making concern ; and this lack of country sympathies exists today among many who have survived the embitterment of the agricultural depression. Other young hereditary landlords have been seduced from their allegiance to the land by the racket of modern London life, and have little affection for their property. The dispossessed, whose num-

bers have been rapidly increasing since 1929, now live principally in London, and their spiritual ties with the countryside have failed to survive their dispossession.

Just as, in the past, it needed only a generation on the land to make an aristocrat, so today does it only require a generation off the land to unmake him. In severing her connection with the soil the aristocracy lost the sense of responsibility which went with it. Instead of making for herself new roots she went adrift. She lost her personality, and became absorbed in the rootless, restless, social world which never had contact with earth. Standards which she had instinctively acquired through the possession of land and its obligations dwindled away. Tradition she cast aside, mistaking it for sentiment. Culture, except in the case of a few great houses which survived, had already gone from her. Character and sensibility are now following. You cannot uproot a class which has lived on the soil for centuries without engendering a grave dislocation of its internal system.

True, it is still the aim of those who can afford it to have a "country house." But this, today, has become a mockery. It arises from the week-end habit which, in the guise of its saviour, has actually destroyed the old country life. Centrally heated and windows shut, the week-end country house excludes every breath of country air. Modern Tudor in style, it is furnished by a London firm. It has a lawn and a few flower-beds, a tennis-court and a commodious garage. It is situated conveniently close to London, and as near as possible to a golf-course. The guests, when they are not playing games

out of doors, are playing them indoors—bridge, backgammon or bezique. The Thames valley, the pinewoods of Surrey and Berkshire and the Kentish Weald abound in these so-called "country houses." Sunningdale, Maidenhead, Burnham-Beeches, Hindhead, honeycombed with tarmac roads, where every open space is a golf course, bear glaring witness to the suburban travesty which English country life has become. Most who live this life have neither sympathy with the country nor appreciation of its beauties.

Almost worse is the "artiness" which has invaded many of the loveliest English villages. Here that abortion, the "country cottage," flourishes: "olde-worlde," with brightly painted windows, cretonne curtains, sham-Jacobean furniture, pewter and art pottery on the window-sills, it is planned according to a standardized conception of what an old English cottage should be like. Its owners may be animated by a genuine desire for country life, but its hollow lack of personality only shows how far they have strayed from any instinctive feeling for the soil.

This is, to a great extent, unavoidable. Now that the "leisured classes" must work they must live in London. And, since they only have week-ends free, it is natural that their country horizon should be bounded by the Home Counties. But town life has now become so much of a habit with them that, even when they are free to choose, they will prefer the town. Whereas in the early days of industrialism people lived in towns from necessity, now they do so from choice. They will sell their country houses without much regret, provided they can keep on a house in London. Thus they have lost all link with

the country. They are out of place there, ill-at-ease. The great mass of the younger generation has not been brought up in the country at all, and has no affinity with nature. This can only produce an unnatural generation.

Society sets less store by nature than do the middle-classes, with whom "Back to Nature" is the cry of the moment. But as long as "Back to Nature" means organized nudism and hiking in regimental formation, the movement will defeat its own ends. It has done so already in Germany. Mr. Wyndham Lewis¹ quotes Miss Cicely Hamilton, who says of the *Wandervögel*,

"[The foreigner] imagines them wandering over forest and fen as irresponsibly as the birds their namesakes: strolling hither and thither as the spirit moves them, sharing pot-luck and finding shelter in barns! Creatures of impulse and taking no thought for the morrow. Whereas, in reality, the goings and comings of these migratory young people . . . are systematized, very neatly and carefully systematized."

She describes the organized hostels, of which there are now thousands, with definite rules and regulations, and against which at first there was a protest from some of the *Wandervögel*.

"Provision for shelter, the malcontents declared, was all very well and very comfortable, but it was not the vagrant life: and it was the vagrant life that brought them into touch with Nature, the villager, the peasant and his field; they had far rather beg a night's lodging from a farmer, sleep in his barn or in the shelter of his stack, than lodge, however comfortably, in Jugendherberge—which were nothing more or less than cheap hotels."

¹ *The Doom of Youth*.

The hiking movement has not yet reached such proportions here; but it is in danger of doing so now that the countryside is becoming a "racket," like Society, art, literature and so much else.

Still, this does indicate a true, English love of nature among the middle and lower classes. It is true that, in Society, and today more than ever, the open-air life has millions of devotees. But this implies little such fondness for the soil which is simply harnessed and otherwise maltreated for the purposes of sport. The majority regard the countryside as one vast arena where they can indulge a propensity for muscular and preferably competitive exercise. Here the Englishman's passion for physical energy can be enjoyed to the full. Tennis, golf, football, cricket and so forth successfully excuse him from facing a moment's dreaded repose. He prefers the pursuit of physical to that of spiritual health. Field sports—hunting, shooting, fishing—do induce a certain æsthetic reaction to the countryside. Though the Philistine will not admit it, one part of his fondness for these sports expresses a subconscious appreciation of natural beauty. To a certain extent it is the same with golf. Golf is fundamentally a gentleman's game. It is leisurely and individualistic. In Scotland, at least, and in many of the older English clubs, it retains this atmosphere. At St. Andrews or Muirfield it still breathes the tradition of an eighteenth-century sport. Hitting the ball is only fifty per cent of the joy of the game. The other fifty—as in hunting—is a feeling for the ground where it is played: the smooth green turf, the undulating sweep of the sand-dunes, the salt breeze in your face as you play out towards the sea, the sea pinks

underfoot and the sound of the larks and the curlews above. But how golf has become vulgarized ! The " highbrow " regards it as the epitome of all that is bourgeois in our civilization, and he is not far wrong. He sees its gross competitiveness, the ludicrous, strident clothes of its players, the stupid monotony of their conversation. Indeed, the average golfer today is totally insensitive either to his natural surroundings or to the traditions of the game. It is the same with racing and cricket, both old and noble sports, bound up with the history of the countryside. Cricket is becoming professionalized, racing the perquisite of vulgarians and others of low mentality.

In fact, I fear, on second thoughts, that we must retract our bouquet from the devotees of hunting and shooting. Hunting today has become, in certain of its aspects, so snobbish as to evince very little of the country sense. Melton Mowbray life is not country life. In the remoter counties the country squire still imparts some of the old English spirit into hunting : but for the most part he can no longer afford to hunt. Similarly, how many of those who go to Scotland to stalk, fish, or shoot grouse are sensitive to the bare beauty of a Scottish moorland, to the luminous brown depths of a mountain stream, to the rich colour of that serene and island-scattered sea ? Does their soul respond to the scent of the heather, the crisp tang of the Scottish air, the gentle moisture of Western rains ? I doubt it ; and the modern Society woman, with her varnished fingernails, her false eyelashes and her platinum hair has no place in such surroundings. Nature is not sufficiently ordered, not sufficiently artificial for her. How many Englishmen notice the patina of an

autumn beech leaf, the purple shoots of winter thorns, the grey-green hide of an ash still naked in Spring ? The scented openness of Sussex downs in summer, the rich, amber light of a Devon autumn, the almost obscene lushness of a Worcestershire May have no place in their hearts. Their memories of the country are inseparably bound up with action : memories of a five-yard putt on the last green at Wentworth, of a hard run with The Quorn, of a record bag in the Fens. They can appreciate no scenic effects but the most obvious. Views must be distant to be impressive ; you must be able to see over at least five counties. They can respond to the Alps, because they are high, and to the blue of the Mediterranean, because it is bright ; but not the gentle contours of the Cheviots or the subtly grey waters of the English Channel.

Even our modern poets neglect nature ; while the number of educated people who read poetry is small. A wit remarked that there are two ways of disliking poetry : one is to dislike poetry and the other is to like Pope. A third is, certainly, to dislike the country, and the great body, even of educated people, now come under that heading.

Yet nature can provide man with the two things essential to his well-being : solitude and peace. Moreover, she has a basic dignity which modern man lacks.

Modern society dreads nothing in this world so much as being alone. Few people are ever alone from choice. It is considered unnatural. At school the boy who shuns his fellows to commune with his own soul is regarded with suspicion. He is " not like other boys " ; therefore he must be radically morbid

and unhealthy. The herd spirit is fostered from the earliest age.

Lord D'Abernon is almost the only man I have ever seen dining alone, in evening dress, in a fashionable London restaurant. No ordinary man would dare to do so. He would be the object, not only of embarrassing condolence, but of ridicule. Similarly, were he to go to the country all by himself for a week-end his acquaintances would consider him to be not quite right in the head or "up to no good." To justify their existence people must always be seen in crowds, wherever they go. The modern snobbery does not admit of solitude. It is held to spell failure. The average person is literally terrified of being alone, as of a species of annihilation; and not without reason, since, left alone, many men do not exist. They have no inner life, no power of thought, and they are not real to themselves.

There was a young man who said, "God !
Now doesn't it strike you as odd
That a tree's not a tree
But ceases to be
When there's no one about in the quad."

In the famous Oxford limerick (which I have doubtless misquoted) the tree corresponds very nearly to the ordinary Society woman today. Even at home, in her most intimate actions, she is not alone. There is always "someone about." If she is not surrounded by people the telephone takes their place; in either event the public is devouring news of her every day, while the photographer penetrates into every nook and cranny of her private life. (It can only be a question of time before married couples are photographed in bed.) She is not the unwilling

victim of this system. She manufactures it, because she knows that, were she to be left alone, she would no longer exist. Like that tree, she would cease to be. Sleep, in such untoward circumstances, is her only possible course ; or, failing sleep, one of those modish nervous breakdowns. For she is neurotic. She needs the calm of the country to rehabilitate her nerves and her soul, and to restore her to the true values of life.

It is commonly argued that, unless you are sportingly inclined, the country is nothing but a bore. There is nothing to "do" there. Possibly there is nothing to do. But man should not always be doing things. If he is to preserve his balance he must lay aside a time for contemplation. Only the country, in modern life, still provides space for contemplation. The country should be a stimulus to thought instead of, as is supposed, a deadening and vegetable existence. For the country is never dead. In each blade of grass, in each gust of wind, in the hedgerows and the fields and the rivers is life, and true companionship. Life is in the air itself ; which is more than you can say of Mayfair.

But it is a restful life, a life which "lets you be" ; a life which, if anything, urges you not to be up and doing, but to be up and thinking, up and feeling. It provides rest for the nerves and the body, food for the mind and the soul. Peace is its essence ; and peace is the essence of man's well-being.

Dr. Renier, in his analysis of England, finds "normal and old-English humanity" among the peasant classes. This is because their contact with the soil is direct and simple, and their feelings, their lives, are simplified accordingly. They have no

noise and bustle to sweep them off their feet, complicate their reactions, and dehumanize them. They see things directly and clearly. Lack of simplicity is Society's gravest sin. It is not altogether her own fault. Mechanical "progress" has brought complexity into her life. But in proportion as it is removing her from earth into a world of machines, so should she strengthen of her own free will her roots with earth and a world of natural functions. Here lies the only hope of counteracting the demoralization of material "progress." Only by rooting herself in the soil again can she retain her balance in the world.

No man truly lives whose soul is dead to natural beauty. Conversely no man whose soul is awake to nature can go far astray in his relations with humanity.

An appreciation of beauty is essential to human happiness. Society people are not happy, because their souls are dead. Sometimes they may think that they are ; but their standards of happiness are low. They have to seek sensation because incapable of emotion. Their feelings, when not pure sensation, are no more than nervous reflexes.

The malignity of nature is commonly stressed today. But the extent of nature's cruelty, or rather, the extent to which it affects man, varies from one part of the world to another. In the far north, where she is hard and relentless, she produces grim, dour men. In the south, where she is flamboyant and gay, she produces a passionate, laughing people. In tropical countries the violence of her extremes reacts proportionately on the character of her inhabitants. But here in England we have

no frozen seas or jungles or fever swamps ; we have little animal life, such as emphasizes the malignant forces of nature ; we are a vegetable land. In England nature, harsh as she may be beneath the surface, seems calm and gentle. She is moderate. She smiles, and comforts. She breathes peace and sympathy. But withal she is strong. Hence the character of the old Englishman who was born of nature, in contrast with that of the modern Englishman who was born of a standard machine. The English gentleman—the English gentle man—was inseparable from the soil. Therein lay his strength, his individualism, his humanity.

If English Society is to regain personality and stability her first step must be a reversion to the soil which nurtured her, and where the trees which her ancestors planted, still standing firm, regard her with a mute reproach for her restlessness. Only thus can she cease to be an undignified offshoot of the cosmopolitan world.

CHAPTER XIV

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Summary—Increase of leisure—The coming generation—Wider moral outlook—Art and the machine—Informality and freedom—The plain man animates a new spirit.

WHAT of the future ?

We have traced, over a period of a century, the gradual development of modern society, and we have seen that its history is, broadly, the rise of the middle-classes. This process of social leavening began with the Reform Bill of 1832, continued imperceptibly in pace with the industrial advances of the nineteenth century, underlay the Liberalism of the Edwardian Era, was violently accelerated by the Great War, and has, after a hundred years, reached its apotheosis in the fashionable middle-class plutocracy of the nineteen-thirties. During the post-war epoch it was assisted in various ways : by the passing of the " man of leisure " and the entrance of the former aristocracy into all the trades and professions, by the emancipation of women, and by the *zeitgeist* of which that emancipation was only a part : the general impulse to liberty and the break-up of formalism. Its result is the merging of the upper with the upper-middle-class. The term " aristocracy " has practically ceased to exist ; the term " upper-class " applies principally to a " Society " invented by the Press,

in which the most prominent figures are members of the old middle-class, and in which cosmopolitan standards prevail.

Since this body no longer has political power, since it no longer represents an aristocracy or the immediate circle of the Throne, it can have little direct significance in the State. But its indirect influence on a great body of the population is considerable. Now that it has lost its exclusiveness it represents an actual goal for the old upper-middle-class, besides, as always in the past, a spiritual example to the existing middle-class as a whole. Its levelling process, abolishing social barriers and reducing all, in theory, to a single-class level, should result in the abolition of a society standard altogether. But this is impossible, in view of the persistence of a monarchical system which involves a privileged class and of the consequently innate snobbery of the English people. Thus, instead of an elimination of snob values, we have found merely a change in their nature, by which worship of wealth, speed, noise and success or notoriety in any form, takes precedence over a respect for the qualities of birth, breeding, intellect and personality.

Now the advance of mechanical civilization, in combination with the *zeitgeist*, is probably contributing to the greater happiness of the greater number. Mr. H. G. Wells speaks of "the development of the new common people into a world of civilization of free and happy individuals." The average member of the middle and lower classes has far more leisure than ever he had in the past, and proportionately more means of enjoying that leisure. On the other hand, the average member

of Society—or the upper-classes—has less. One might expect him to be enriched by contact with the middle-classes and their life, and to take the opportunity, denied to them, of combining the experience and good qualities of both. But this has not occurred. He has merely descended to their level, and his aristocratic qualities, good with bad, have been swamped in the process. As a result of his curtailment of leisure his scope of life recedes in exact proportion as the scope of the middle-class life advances. At its best it remains stationary. Their horizons narrow and widen respectively, until they will coincide into a norm. The plain man grows proportionately more individual than before, the Society man proportionately more standardized; the one more educated in the affairs of the mind, the other more ignorant; the one more enlightened, the other less refined; the one more human, through his wider contact with life, the other less so. In short, the sensibilities of the one are being awakened, while those of the other are dulled.

The plain man is definitely the more human of the two beings, and even what are classed as his lowest instincts—his love of sensation, for instance, as portrayed in the Sunday Press—spring from a thwarted curiosity about human nature. The *News of the World* every week exceeds in sheer human interest any modern work of realism which has yet been published!

The motor car, the railway and the motor omnibus have provided the plain man with cheaper and easier communications; cinemas, dance-halls, clubs, cafés and sports grounds have opened up to him a wider field of amusement and social life; gramophones

and the wireless enable him to gratify musical tastes, and increase his field of knowledge ; his education is altogether better, and the newspapers stimulate in him a curiosity about matters intellectual and scientific.

But while the general standard of life—intellectual, material and spiritual—is higher, the potential standard is lower. This must be set by those at the top. The upper-classes—or those who, in the guise of Society, take the place of the upper-classes in modern life—should lead the way. Instead of descending to the norm they should rise above it. They do not, not because they cannot, but because they will not. They accept the worldly limitations of cosmopolitan materialism. They allow themselves to become the slave of mechanical progress where they should be its master. They make of the modern round of amusements—typified by the plain man's cinemas, cafés, dance-halls and sports grounds—an end in itself instead of a means to an end. By preaching to him the gospel of the “good time” they lead him down a cul-de-sac when they should be pointing the road to a fuller life. The plain man to-day acquires knowledge from the newspapers, where before he read little ; the Society man in reading only the newspapers, sets himself a lower intellectual standard than he did in the past when his reading was deeper. While the one is probing below the surface of his world, the other grows more superficial in relation to his. It can only follow that, by Society's example, the ultimate standard of life is debased where it should be exalted.

But perhaps the plain man will not follow Society's example. Perhaps he will even react against it. This is to be hoped. But for such a hope to be

realized that virulent germ of snobbery must be eradicated from the Englishmen's organism. At the moment too many forces combine to foster it. So long as they continue to do so will Society's influence over the population prevail.

In scanning the history of a period it is useless to apportion blame to any one generation. All are victims of the *zeitgeist*. If we find that our fathers were materialists, and that they made little effort to stem the tide of materialism, it is only because the forces of the time were too strong for them. So it was with the lifeless hypocritical ritualism of the Victorians. We cannot blame our parents for that which they absorbed from the spirit of the previous age and of their own, and for a certain inability to adapt themselves to the spirit of this. On the contrary, we can be grateful to them that they have come so quickly to accept so much in it of what is naturally repugnant to them. We can but observe the forces of the time and allow for the reaction of each generation towards them. To criticize is vain.

The youth of every epoch has received a lion's share of the criticism. Today, probably, she receives more—though equally apportioned with praise—than at any time within the last hundred years. Old age reigned supreme over the Victorians and middle-age over the Edwardians ; not until now has youth monopolized the centre of the stage. Hence the temptation is greater, today, to vilify—or glorify—youth in comparison with age and experience.

There are those, for instance, who will say that pre-War youth was better educated than that of the present time. This is probably true. Intellectually, we are not a well-grounded generation. But this

again is due to the circumstances of the time. Pre-War youth had ample leisure in which to educate itself—and it is self-education alone which counts. The present generation has no such leisure ; few of them even have time or money to go to the university. Whether properly equipped or not, they must plunge straight away into the business of a career. It is understandable that they should be charged with an egregious shallowness and capacity for bluff ; indeed, in subconscious self-protection, they claim for themselves an infallibility to which no previous generation has pretended. On the other hand, they have detachment, resource and adaptability to make up for deficiencies in education. They have a commercial sense in a commercial age. Invidious comparisons between the two generations—between any two generations—are ruled out of court by the fact of the different spirit behind each, over which neither had control.

But the modern generation is no longer my own generation. Things move today with such rapidity and violence that one can measure generations, spiritually, in periods of ten, instead of thirty, years. There is a wide difference between the young men of 1920 and the young men of 1930. To begin with, the latter start life at an earlier age. At eighteen they are ready for the fray, whereas we were still feeling our way gingerly at twenty-two. They are tough, ambitious, cold, and calculating ; they know what they want and are ruthless in its pursuit. They are unscrupulous and, often, unfeeling. The militant cynicism of the coming men of the 'thirties, born without illusion, is of a very different kidney from the disillusioned cynicism of

the 'twenties. If we claim for our own generation more psychology, more human qualities, more artistic sensibility, better manners, more tolerance, gentleness, imagination and resilience, we cannot but recognize in the coming generation their thicker skins, their greater stamina, their firmer decision, their self-confidence and their capacity for work: their more definite, if less subtle and sensitive characters, born of the different spirit of their time. We may regard with apprehension their unabashed worldliness, their interest in facts at the expense of ideas, their lack of finer perceptions or of any belief in the values of the soul. Nevertheless this attitude should do its work in destroying for ever the crusted parrot-codes of our ancestors: the sham idealism and moral hypocrisy, the barriers of irrational prejudice which separated them from any direct impact with life. Lack of religion in the coming generation is to the good if ultimately it will free us from the narrowness, the inhumanity, the dishonesty into which the conventions of church-made religion brought us. From the exorcism of this incubus may spring from within a fresh religious sense, a new and enlightened system of beliefs based upon those human impulses which in the beginning actuated Christianity.

Indeed, it is in the very nature of modern society that some such awakening should occur. Extremes of materialism must in the long run defeat their own ends. There must, in time, arise an individualist reaction against standardization, an intellectual reaction against Philistinism, a human reaction against animalism. It is, perhaps, Society's saving grace that those evil symptoms which we have diagnosed in her should be so advanced. It encour-

ages us to hope that the end may not be far off, and that a new birth may yield a child destined to a more enlightened maturity than that bouncing middle-class baby of 1832. It is too much to hope, perhaps, for a new aristocracy based upon intellect and personal merit. But the fact that it is no longer based on arbitrary class distinctions is an encouraging augury for the future.

There are other such auguries. The new moral freedom, with its spirit of frankness, its lack of moral prejudice, its freedom from sex repression can only lead to a wider sympathy and understanding of humanity. It is the one constructive achievement of the post-war epoch. The 'twenties, a period of experiment and iconoclasm in this respect, have given place to an age of satisfactory sex adjustment on new lines. The promiscuity and moral anarchy of the post-war epoch is being succeeded by a code of sex morality, based not on general rules but on the instincts of the individual. For, despite what their elders say, the modern generation *has* a moral code, though it be one that needs no formulæ. "So far, about morals," says Mr. Ernest Hemingway, "I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after." That, I think, typifies the modern attitude, from which is arising an instinctive new morality. It is possible to anticipate, instinctively, whether a thing will make you "feel good or bad."

The new freedom is bound to have wide psychological effects, the chief of which is greater honesty of thought. The young, today, even in Society, are honest with themselves to a degree undreamt of by their forbears.

On the intellectual side we have a revaluation of the public-school standard such as is bound, in time, to bear fruit in the shape of a more intelligent educational system. The public schools themselves are growing more liberal, owing chiefly to the importation of a new and less limited brand of young master. They are beginning to realize, not only the necessity of specialized education, but the importance of leisure, privacy, tolerance and intellectual freedom as part of a boy's environment. There are too, today, about a dozen new schools in this country, some co-educational, some "cranky," all experimental, none subscribing to public-school principles, which are peopled principally by the children of intellectuals and from which, within a few years, it will be possible, by examination of the finished article, to sift out the good and the bad.

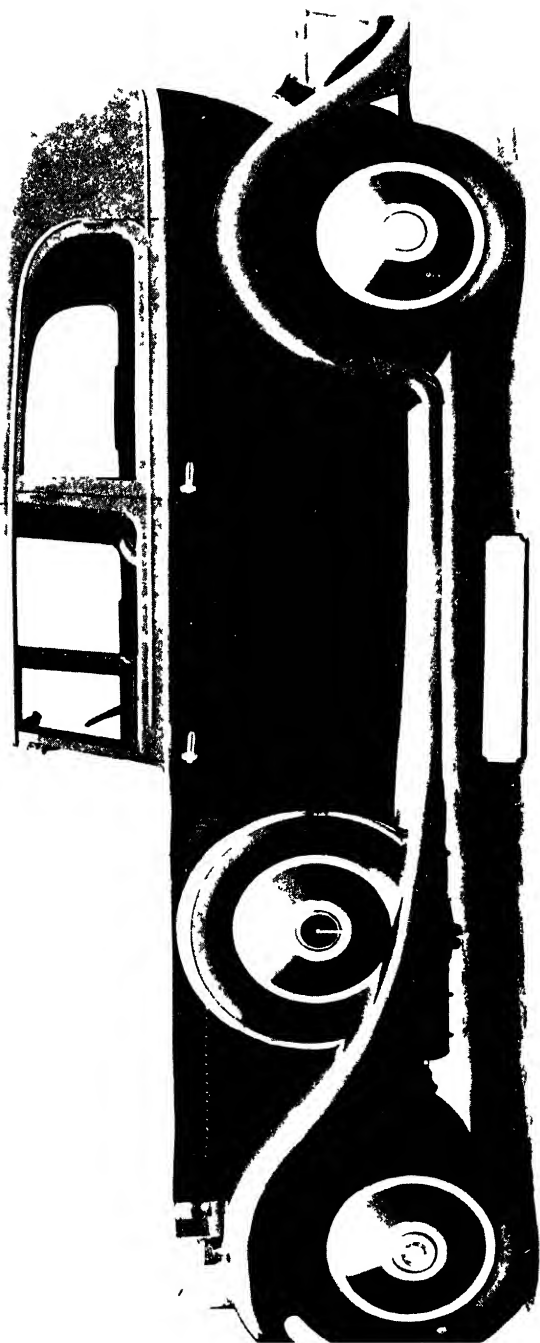
Even in artistic appreciation we can see faint signs of revival. American and other foreign influence is assisting the improvement of popular taste. Cheap goods—as sold, for instance, by Woolworths and imported from Germany and Czecho-Slovakia—display an attractive simplicity of design contrasting admirably with the vulgarity of taste which has reigned unchecked over British manufactured goods since the Great Exhibition. It is not too much to hope that British manufacturers will ultimately fall under this influence. In the upper-classes good taste, as we have seen, is now "fashionable," and, evil as the actual effects of this may be upon personal discrimination, standardized good taste has more hopeful possibilities than standardized bad taste. At least it provides an environment in which artistic appreciation can grow.

But of deeper significance is the growing sense of form and line which is growing from man's association with machines. Society today is more interested in motor cars than she is in pictures. But this interest is bearing fruit in the vastly improved design of cars—not to mention aeroplanes—within the last few years. It is now being realized that a machine can by its own, though not by academic, standards be a work of art ; indeed many designers of cars even sacrifice comfort to art. A sense of line in coachwork design does not argue a sense of line in drawing or sculpture, but fundamentally it is the same thing. The latter does argue the former ; it may only be a question of time, therefore, before the former develops into the latter. Possibly Lord Portarlington and all the other noblemen who aid the motor business in various capacities are laying the foundations of a new era in æsthetic appreciation—though most of them would hotly disclaim any connection with æsthetics ! Mr. Frederick Etchells in his introduction to Corbusier notes these

“ first faint indications of a spontaneous and unforced interest in æsthetic matters on the part of the modern man. He has had an admirable unconscious schooling through the trim efficiency and finish of the machines and apparatus which surround and govern so much of his daily life. Already the average user of the motor car is beginning to take a keen pleasure in good bodywork, in cleanness of line and general design. It must be many years indeed since such close attention has been given to a particular æsthetic problem by so large a number of human beings. It is not too much to hope that this interest may soon include within its scope our modern architecture, passing from, it may be, an appreciation of works of a functional or purely constructional character to embrace works of even greater significance.”

The informality of modern society is something gained over that of previous ages. Perverted though it is at present by the cosmopolitan influence, it should imply, ultimately, an easier and more natural social atmosphere, in which intimacy can flourish and gaiety be unrepressed by conventions. This atmosphere is already apparent in the streets of London. Fashionable night-life may be uniform and boring, but since the Puritan conscience began to modify and the taste for amusement to spread through every class in the community, there is more feeling of life in the air. The middle classes used to sit stuffily over their firesides of an evening, muttering that an Englishman's home was his castle and what did these young sparks want to go gadding about all over the town for, when they had a respectable home to sit in ?

This was the essential difference between London and Paris. It is not the high life or the low life that makes the gaiety of Paris : it is, as I remarked earlier, the middle class life, in the cafés and in the streets. Hitherto London has had little night-life between high and low—between the clubs and the pubs. But her middle class night-life is increasing by leaps and bounds, since the younger suburbanites decided that it was no longer disreputable to go out in the evenings. The London of the 'thirties is full of good cheap restaurants and snack-bars and cafés and *brasseries* ; not to mention cinema houses, news theatres, and non-stop variety shows for inexpensive amusement. Moreover the public-houses are cleaner, brighter and more enterprising than they were a few years ago. In time open-air restaurant life, such as used to exist a hundred years ago, will



This car, designed by Lord Portarlington, may indicate a reversion
to an æsthetic sense on the part of the Upper Classes

come back. In early Victorian times there were about 200 open-air pleasure resorts, like Sadler's Wells, Vauxhall and Ranelagh, in or within easy reach of London. Many of them, such as the old nursery gardens of Hammersmith and Fulham, have been swallowed up in building development. But outside London, on the arterial roads, new road-houses are springing up, and in London itself Mr. Lansbury's Hyde Park "Lido" is a reflection of a new spirit in this direction. Futile restrictions may still hamper the amusement trade, but in the younger generation there is very little trace of the Puritan spirit, and it can only be a question of time before such restrictions go by the board. It is not today considered wrong to "enjoy life." This is a big step forward, which may ultimately infuse London with some of the spirit of Paris. But the change is operating from below, not from above. Where there is life it is the plain man who animates it. He, not the aristocrat, is infusing England with a new spirit.

Another factor which has always contributed to the greater gaiety of Paris is its complete absence of wealth snobbery. In Paris, poverty has never been the social stigma that it still is to a great extent in London. The freedom of Paris is its freedom from pretension. There you need not make yourself out to be richer than you are; for nobody cares. You can be just as happy on ten francs as you can on a thousand, and it is even a social stigma to be rich! London, by contrast, is a wealthy rather than a gay city in its atmosphere. But since the financial crisis there are many signs of modification in this respect. It is no longer fashionable to pretend to be richer than you are; you must pretend to be poorer.

Society still lives crazily beyond her income, being quite unable to conceive of the true nature of the simple life. But the germ of comprehension is there, and as she becomes poorer, so may she become simpler.

In the long run, may we not trust to the inherent goodness of human nature to turn Society from its present stupid *impasse*? Human nature, for the last hundred years has been warped by every kind of lying, cramping influence from without. But today it can truly be said that a man's life, psychologically, is at least fifty per cent his own, to do what he likes with. If at the moment he is misusing that freedom may it not be that the suddenness of its acquisition has swept him temporarily off his feet? Give him time, and he will learn to use it well.

Chagford, 1932.

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